

PRAYER

Speaking to God

Prepared by the Reverend Brent Anderson



Everyone can pray

Everyone can pray. All of us know how to pray when the moment is right. Everyone who has ever suffered and has ever looked for help knows how to pray. Prayer is an amateur sport. It doesn't take fancy language and it doesn't take a degree in theology. In her book *Thirst*, Mary Oliver has a poem called "Praying."

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*It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch*



*a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but a doorway*

*into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.*

In speaking to God in prayer we can be perfectly open and honest and as expressive as we need or desire. We need not be afraid. We need not hide our true thoughts or our true feelings. For we can't. God knows. God sees. God hears. God loves. God accepts. God forgives.

In Psalm 50, God says ¹⁵*Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.* In the book of James we read: ¹³*Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.* ¹⁴*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.* ¹⁵*The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.* ¹⁶*Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.* James 5:13–16 (NRSV).

Everyone can pray! Even people who have successfully avoided or ignored God all their lives, will turn to God in their suffering. Some of the most fervent prayers come from atheists in moments of distress. There is truth in the old saying *"There are no atheists in foxholes."* When people suffer, they naturally cry out for someone or something to save them. And most often, it is God!

How NOT to pray

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches his disciples how *not* to pray (Matthew 6:5a, 7–8, NRSV): ⁵*And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others.* ⁷*When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.* ⁸*Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."*

Eugene Peterson has an insightful paraphrase³ which says: *"And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? "Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace. "The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply."*

Martin Luther on prayer

Martin Luther, the great Reformer of the sixteenth century, gave us some clear advice on prayer. He said that prayer should be **"brief, frequent and intense."**² Be quick about it. Do it often. And be passionate. You don't need to put a lot of words into it, but do it all the time and do it with all your heart. Pray *simply, honestly and often* or as Martin Luther says, "brief, frequent, and intense."

What should we pray for?

The natural answer to this question is "What do you long for? What is your deepest wish or desire?"

Prayer allows us to look, see, and dream. In prayer, we can look at ourselves, our families, our friends, our neighbors, and the world around us together with God, to see them for how they really are, and to dream about how these things can be made better—more healthy, more whole,

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and more life-giving. We can ask God to influence people and situations and we can dedicate ourselves to joining in that work. We can think about what we want to see change in our hearts, our lives, our families, our neighborhoods, our churches, and our world and then we can speak these needs and desires to God and invite God's spirit to move.

As we deepen our relationship with God and as we attune ourselves to God and God's ways, we will begin to see the world more like Christ. We will care more and more about the things that God cares about. And our prayers will change.

In teaching his disciples about prayer, Jesus told his friends what to pray for⁴: Pray for your enemies. Pray for food. Pray that you won't be tempted. Pray for forgiveness. Pray that God's way of life will fill the world. Praise God for God's holiness! Give thanks to God for God's unending kingdom! Praise God for God's never-ending power! Give thanks to God for God's glory which is forever!

Five Categories of Spoken Prayer

Many have found it helpful to separate our prayers into different categories or types.

Praise (Psalm 146:1-2)

Praise celebrates the qualities or attributes of God; what we like about God. In praise, we adore God for who God is. It is an open response of our love for God. These prayers focus on the person of God. Just as we love hearing that our loved ones love us, so God desires to hear why we love God.

Thanksgiving (Ephesians 5:20)

Thanksgiving celebrates the things that God has done (past), is doing (present), or will do (future). Prayers of thanksgiving reveal a heart of gratitude. They show awareness for what God has done, express appreciation for God's works, and honor God's actions and gifts. These prayers focus on the actions of God. Just as we appreciate hearing words of appreciation for the things that we do, God appreciates hearing words of thanksgiving for the things that God does.

Confession (1 John 1:9)

Confession is agreeing with God about the sin in our life.

It removes any barriers sin might have put between us and God. Your confession shows that we agree with God that we have done wrong and that we accept the forgiveness that Jesus' death has provided for us. The prayers focus on our failure to live as God desires us to live. Just as we need to confess to people when we have wronged them, we need to confess our failings and shortcomings to God.

Personal Petition (1 Samuel 1:26-28)

These prayers ask God to work on our behalf; to meet our needs. We pray about the situations and circumstances we find ourselves in and we ask God to do something for us. We reflect on our own needs and lift these needs up to God in prayer. Just as we can turn to others when we need help, so too, we can turn to God.

Intercession (Ephesians 6:18-19)

These prayers ask God to work on behalf of others. We recognize the needs of others and pray for them, asking God to move or to work to meet their needs. Just as we might ask others to help out a friend or neighbor, so should we turn to God and ask God to help others.

Acts of Prayer

Many have found the ACTS acrostic to be a helpful way to remember the various categories of prayer. ACTS stands for **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving, and **S**upplication.

Adoration

Prayers of adoration are essentially prayers of praise. In these prayers, we express our praise for who God is. We tell God we love Him and adore Him and why.

Confession

Prayers of confession are our opportunity to come clean to God; to reveal all those areas in our lives where we have fallen short and express our remorse.

Thanksgiving

Prayers of thanksgiving are our opportunity to express our gratitude for the things God has done for us, for all of humanity, and for all of creation.

Supplication

Prayers of supplication are prayers in which we make our requests known to God. We ask God for things. We make both requests for ourselves (petitions) and for others (intercessions).

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The Finger Prayer

Many people have found it helpful in prayer to use the hand as a visual reminder of the things for which we should pray. Each finger of the hand represents a different subject of prayer.

THE THUMB—(those close to us) When we put our hands together in front of us, our thumbs are the fingers that are closest to us. The thumb is also the biggest finger and so it represents those who play a big role in our lives; those closest to us. We remember to pray for our family, friends, and significant others—those close to us.

THE INDEX FINGER—(those who guide) This is the pointing finger. It reminds us to pray for people who point the way; people who help and guide us. We remember to pray for our spiritual leaders and friends, our parents, teachers, and other influential people in our life. We also remember to pray for doctors and nurses and emergency service personnel.

THE MIDDLE FINGER—(the powerful) This is the tallest finger of the hand. It reminds us to pray for those held in high esteem, for people in places of authority, for leaders of our nation, our local government, our communities. We pray for God to be at work among our celebrities and other people of wealth and power.

THE RING FINGER—(the weak) This is the weakest finger of the hand. This finger reminds us to pray for the weakest members of our society—those who are poor, sick, lonely, oppressed, homeless, voiceless, outcasts, or victims of violence. We might even pray for our children.

THE LITTLE FINGER—(ourselves) This is the last and smallest finger of the hand and it is a reminder that God calls us to be humble. In Romans 12:3, Paul says "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought." And so when we look at this finger, we remember this call to humility. We remember to place others' needs ahead of our own. We swallow our pride. And in humility, we pray for ourselves and our own concerns. And we ask God to show us where we can serve others.

The Collect

A Collect (pronounced "kah-lect") is a very basic yet ancient form of prayer that has been used in the Western Church for many centuries. It is one of the most commonly used forms of prayer used by people who lead public or corpo-

rate prayers. It "collects" or "gathers up" all five parts of the prayer around one common theme. This theme is often taken from scripture, the liturgical season (time of the church year), or circumstance or reason for the gathering for public prayer. Collects are meant to be short and to the point with all five parts centering around a common theme. Using this shape, leaders can craft prayers that are classic in form and substance, yet relevant in nature and language. Some people creatively call this form of prayer, the "**You-Who-Do-Through**" prayer.

THE FIVE PARTS OF THE COLLECT

1. **Address to God**
2. **Characteristic of God (forms the basis of the petition)**
3. **The Petition (requests something of God)**
4. **The Desired Result**
5. **The Doxological Conclusion**

Consider these examples:

1. *Almighty God*
2. *To whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid:*
3. *Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit*
4. *That we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name*
5. *Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

—or—

1. *Almighty God,*
2. *the fountain of all wisdom*
3. *enlighten by your Holy Spirit those who teach and those who learn,*
4. *that, rejoicing in the knowledge of your truth, they may worship you and serve you from generation to generation;*
5. *through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

—or—

1. *O God*
2. *You know that today I have broken your commandment of love and that I have gone to bed angry with my friend, my brother in Christ.*
3. *Even though I have been wronged and insulted, teach me how to forgive. Even if I was right, help me to make the first effort and to take the first step to putting things right again. Keep me from foolish pride and from nursing my foolish anger. Help me to keep my eyes focused on Jesus*
4. *That in Him I may see the example of how to forgive, and that in Him I may find the will and the power to forgive*
5. *This I ask for your love's sake. Amen.*

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Part 1—The Address to God

The **YOU** part is how you choose to address and praise God.

For example:

- Almighty God
- Light of the world
- Creator of all that is good
- Divine Healer
- God who sees
- Name above all names
- O God our shield
- Sovereign Lord
- Loving God
- Abba, Father
- God of peace
- God of all grace
- Holy One
- Shepherding God
- God of heaven
- God of patience and steadfast love
- Lord of life and love
- Gracious God, all-consuming fire
- O Lord God
- Compassionate God
- Living God
- God of all encouragement and hope

Part 2—Characteristic of God

The **WHO** part names an attribute or action of God.

For example:

- Who parted the Red Sea
- Who calls us out of sin and slavery
- Who fills the world with life and love
- Who knows us better than we know ourselves
- Who healed the sick and fed the hungry
- Who promises never to leave us or forsake us
- Who sent Jesus into the world to suffer, die, and rise again for our sake
- Who is our only source of hope
- source of all wisdom, justice, truth and love
- Who came to us long ago in the birth of Jesus
- Whose word is authority and power
- Whose way is love
- Whose Spirit brings council and comfort and peace
- Whose chosen dwelling is the hearts of the lowly
- You call us to be your faithful servants
- You call us to pray and you offer yourself to all who seek your face
- You have chosen to speak to us through prophets and wise leaders and most clearly through your Son

- You continually call your people to yourself
- You have shown us what it means to be a servant
- You are the way, the truth, and the life
- You are the source of life and strength and ministry
- In wisdom you created us and all good things

Part 3—The Petition

The **DO** part makes a request connected to the attribute or action of God we just named (What do we want God to do?). It begins with an action verb. For example:

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| • Grant... | • Enable... | • Keep... |
| • Empower... | • Come... | • Kindle... |
| • Show... | • Comfort... | • Forgive... |
| • Help... | • Speak... | • Breathe... |
| • Save... | • Listen... | • Take... |
| • Fill... | • Dwell... | • Teach... |
| • Send... | • Renew... | • Bless... |
| • Accept... | • Clothe... | • Draw... |
| • Provide... | • Claim... | • Warm... |
| • Give... | • Make... | • Wipe... |
| • Strengthen... | • Create... | • Protect... |
| • Prepare... | • Defend... | • Cleanse... |
| • Quicken... | • Instill... | • Clear... |
| • Enlighten... | • Infuse... | • Place... |
| • Direct... | • Inspire... | • Lead... |
| • Encourage... | • Quiet... | • Break... |

Part 4—The Desired Result

The **TO** part explains why you are asking God for this (*To* what end? Or *To* what result?). For example:

- So that...
- That we may...
- That those who...
- That you might...
- That...

Part 5—The Doxological Conclusion

The **THROUGH** part acknowledges that Jesus invited us to pray according to his authority as he advocates for us. For example:

- Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
- Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
- In Jesus' (Christ's) name we pray. Amen.
- We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.
- For your love's sake. Amen.
- Accept our prayer for the sake of your Son, our Savior. Amen.

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The Breath Prayer

Among the many forms of prayer is one known as the breath prayer. This prayer takes its name from the Hebrew word *ruah* רוח which can be translated as “wind, breath, or spirit.” The *ruah* or wind of God hovered over the waters of chaos in creation (Genesis 1:2). God breathed the breath of life into the first living being (Genesis 2:7). The wind of God is called forth to raise up the dry bones (Ezekiel 37:5). And it is the Spirit of God that is breathed into the disciples when Jesus says, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). And so the reason it is called the breath prayer is because it is simply a way for us to continually be aware that we are living in the breath of God at every moment—that we have received God’s breath from the moment of God’s creation. Because this way of praying reminds us that we share God’s breath, and because it comes as easily and naturally as breathing, it is known as the breath prayer.

Perhaps the best known breath prayer is the one called the Jesus Prayer:

*“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
Have mercy on me, a sinner.”*

The Jesus prayer originated in the Christian tradition of the East and can be traced back to the sixth century. At that time, monks and others who were seeking a deeper relationship with God sought a disciplined form of prayer they could pray anywhere and at anytime.

The breath prayer arises from our deepest need and gives us a way to follow the apostle Paul’s admonishment to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Just as breathing supports life and renews our physical body, unceasing prayer keeps us attentive to God’s presence and renews our spirit. The breath prayer is always a prayer of praise and petition—the praise portion of the prayer is what we call God, reflecting how we view God or understand who God is; the petition portion of the prayer is what we think or desire God to say of us... something we need the most.

Instead of using other people’s words, we each discover our own breath prayer. To discover your breath prayer, follow these simple steps:

Step 1

Sit comfortably and calm yourself. Close your eyes and be mindful that you are in God’s loving presence. Recall a pas-

sage from scripture that places you in a peaceful frame of mind. “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10) is a verse that many people find calming.

Step 2

With your eyes closed, imagine that God is calling you by name. Hear God’s asking, “(Your name), what do you want?”

Step 3

Answer God directly with whatever comes honestly from your heart. Your answer may be no more than a single word, such as peace or love or forgiveness. Your answer might instead be a phrase or a brief sentence, such as “I want to feel your forgiveness” or “I want to know your love.” Whatever your response, it will be at the heart of your prayer. You may “want” many things, but wants can be narrowed to your deepest yearning that is basic to your spiritual well-being. The question to be asked is What do I want that will make me feel most whole?

Step 4

Choose your favorite name or image for God. Choices people commonly make include God, Shepherd, Jesus, Spirit, Living Fire, Creator, Lord, Christ, Eternal Light.

Step 5

Combine your name for God with your answer to God’s question “What do you want?” and you have your prayer.

For example:

Desire	Name	Possible Prayer
Rest	Shepherd	My Shepherd, let me rest in thee.
To be led	Eternal Light	Lead me on my way, Eternal Light.
Love	Jesus	Jesus, let me feel your love.
Mercy	Father	Holy Father, forgive me.
Peace	God of Peace	God of Peace, help me to be still

If several ideas occur, write down the various possibilities and then eliminate and/or combine ideas until you have focused your prayer. Once you get at the heart of your yearning, search for words that give it expression. Then work with these words until you have a prayer of six to eight syllables that flows smoothly when spoken aloud or expressed silently as thoughts of the heart. Explore your breath prayer. Emphasize different words of the prayer. “FATHER, let me see your way.” “Father, LET me see your way.” “Father, let ME see your way.” etc. This helps us discover the nuances of our breath prayer.

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Some prayers are most rhythmic when God's name is placed at the beginning. Others require it at the end. When your prayer seems right for you, use it again and again throughout the day. In time it will come as easily and naturally as breathing and you will be answering Scripture's call to pray unceasingly.

Adapted from *The Hunger of the Heart* by Ron DelBene.

Appreciating the Attributes of God

Below you will find a list of attributes or characteristics of God. Consider choosing one of these and focusing on it for a day (or perhaps even a week) in prayer. Make it the focus of your praise and adoration. If any of these scripture passages speak to you, consider writing them down and carrying them with you to assist you in your prayers.

The Holiness of God—God is God; a cut above; perfect and pure; righteous and right. See Leviticus 11:44–45; Joshua 24:19; Jeremiah 10:12; Psalm 99:1–9; Isaiah 6:1–13; Ezekiel 39:7; Job 12:13; Amos 4:2; John 17:11; Acts 5:3–4, 32; Romans 11:33; Revelation 15:4.

The Self-existence of God—God is eternal; without beginning or end. See Exodus 3:14–15; Nehemiah 9:5b; Psalm 45:6; Psalm 90:1–4; Psalm 102:25–27; Isaiah 40:28–31; Jeremiah 31:3; John 5:26; Acts 17:22–31; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15–20; 1 Timothy 1:17.

The Incomprehensibility of God—We can never fully understand God. Our knowledge will always be limited, partial, falling short. See Job 38:1–41:34; Psalm 139:1–18; Isaiah 55:8–9; Romans 11:33–36; 1 Corinthians 2:6–16. Deuteronomy 29:29.

The Mercy of God—God is fully of mercy, kindness and compassion. See Deuteronomy 4:31; Lamentations 3:22; Daniel 9:9; 1 Peter 1:3–5; 2 Corinthians 5:17–19; Ephesians 2:8–9; Titus 3:4–7.

The Sovereignty of God—God has all authority and power; God is free to do; free to rule and reign over all: see 1 Samuel 2:6–8; 2 Samuel 7:22; Psalm 71:5; Jeremiah 32:17; Job 42:2; Psalm 33:10–11; Psalm 93; Isaiah 46:9–10; Matthew 10:29–30; Romans 8:28

The Faithfulness of God—God is constant, loyal, reliable, steadfast, unwavering, devoted, true, and dependable. See

Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 33:4; Psalm 89:8; Psalm 119:90; Psalm 145:13; Psalm 156:5–8; Lamentations 3:21–24; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 2:13; 1 John 1:9.

The Justice of God—God does what is right; gives people their due. See Genesis 18:25; Exodus 34:6–7; Nehemiah 9:32–33; Psalm 145:17; Romans 9:14–33.

The Goodness of God—God is virtuous, excellent, and upright. There is no dark side to God. See Exodus 34:6–7; Psalm 25:8–10; Psalm 100:1–5; Psalm 136:1; Mark 10:18; John 10:11; Romans 8:28–39; James 1:17; 2 Peter 1:3–4.

The Wisdom of God—God understands all things; always judges rightly; always makes the right decisions. See 1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 92:5; Psalm 147:5; Isaiah 28:29; Isaiah 55:8–9; Daniel 2:20–22; Job 12:13; Jeremiah 10:12; Colossians 2:2–3; Romans 11:33; Romans 16:27

The Tri-unity of God—There is one God; God is one in essence, three in person—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. See Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 3:16–17; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2.

The Omnipotence of God—God holds all power, authority and control over God's creation. See Genesis 17:1; Psalm 115:3; Job 42:2; Luke 1:37; Romans 11:36; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 1:3.

The Omnipresence of God—God is fully present everywhere; we cannot escape God's presence. See 1 Kings 8:27; Job 11:7–9; Psalm 139:7–10; Jeremiah 23:23–24; Acts 17:22–31.

The Omniscience of God—God knows all things. See Psalm 147:5; Ezekiel 11:5; Acts 15:18; Romans 11:33–36; Heb. 4:13.

John Calvin on Prayer

John Calvin calls prayer "*the chief exercise of faith by which we daily receive God's benefits.*"² He describes prayer as a "*sort of agreement between God and us whereby we pour out before him all the desires, joys, sighs, and finally, thoughts of our hearts*" (*Calvin's First Catechism*). Like the Apostle Paul, Calvin urged Christians to pray "continuously" saying that we should lift our hearts to God at all times and pray without ceasing. (*Institutes, III, XX, 28*). Yet, because of our weakness, he says it is necessary for us to set certain hours for prayer (*Institutes III, XX, 50*). He encourages us to

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pray during these times:

- **When we awake in the morning**
- **Before we begin the day's work**
- **Before eating**
- **After eating**
- **Before we go back to sleep at night**

Calvin believed that when we open ourselves up to God in prayer, God is “wholly present to us.” (*Institutes III, XX, 2*). He insisted “words indeed are not always necessary; but true prayer can never be offered without the understanding and the heart.” (*Genevan Catechism*) In other words, we don't necessarily need to “say” anything; we simply need to have our heart and mind focused on God. When we do that, we can be assured that we are in prayer.

Devoting time to prayer

Following Calvin's suggestion that we set aside certain times of the day for prayer, consider setting aside certain times for prayer for yourself.

Be Intentional

Be intentional about the times you choose for daily prayer. Choose times that are convenient for you. Set them aside as special appointments for you with God. Block them out on your daily schedule (add them to your date book; set an alarm or reminder on your phone).

Find a comfortable place

The reality is that you can pray anywhere. But having a place where you will be comfortable and where you won't be disturbed can be helpful.

Relax and Prepare

Some people find that prayer is difficult when all our to-do lists and the cares of the world are running through our heads. Take some time to relax and clear your mind. Offer those things to God. Prepare yourself to pray by taking a few deep breathes. As you do, let those things go.

Welcome God's presence

Remember that prayer is communion with God. Welcome God's presence. Open your heart and your mind to God. Make room inside yourself for God.

Speak and Listen

Speak to God about those things that matter most to you. Consider using the five-finger prayer. And spend some time in silence as you listen for God to speak to you.

Prayers for use throughout the day

DAWN (6am) - *O Lord, we thank you for this new day and for keeping us safe through the night. Keep our hearts and minds free to love you and to serve you. Amen.*

MORNING (8am) - *Loving God, guide us throughout this day. May all that we do, think, and say be pleasing in your sight.*

LATE MORNING (10am) - *Lord, help us to respond to your call in our lives and to recognize your hand at work in and around and among us. Amen.*

NOON (12pm) - *By your Spirit, O God, open our minds that we may hear your Word anew and follow it diligently. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

AFTERNOON (3pm) - *In your mercy, O Lord, bless your Church. Strengthen its leaders, inspire its members, and guide its mission for Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

EVENING (6pm) - *Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on us and forgive us. Amen.*

BEDTIME (9pm) - *Through the hours of this night, O Lord, grant us your peace. In Christ's name. Amen.*

White Board of Prayer

One way to incorporate more prayer into the life of a family is to dedicate a white-board (or dry-erase board) to prayer. Hang a white board in an area of your house where everyone can see it. Encourage everyone in the family to write brief notes about problems or situations for which they would like the household to pray. Consider setting up one half of the white board to list circumstances and situations. Consider setting up the other half to list names of people for whom one family member would like everyone to pray.

Tips for Praying with Children

Teaching children to pray is one of the greatest responsibilities of a parent. Children often have a very natural inclination to prayer. Many children readily imagine prayer as crawling into the arms of a loving parent and telling them the things that are important to them and asking for the things they want or need. Most often, we will teach children to pray by imitation—they will watch you and listen as you pray and they will begin to imitate you. Children like to

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know that their parents are praying for them. It helps them to know that they are important to you and to God. So call them by name in prayer. Teach your children that they can pray at anytime, anywhere, and under any circumstance. Model this for them. Teach them that they can say anything to God that they want to say; even when they are mad or angry, frustrated or sad. Teach them that they don't have to use special words; there is no "magic formula" that will make a prayer "work". God wants to hear what is important to us. And so with a sense of reverence and awe, knowing that God cares about us, loves us, and accepts us, we can turn to God in prayer whenever we want or need. Great times to pray with children include: when they wake up in the morning, before meals, before they head out to school, and before they go to sleep at night.

Prayer Reminders

Many people find it helpful to create "prayer reminders". These usually take the form of post-it notes or small cards placed in specific locations that remind us to meet with God in prayer. The cards themselves might not say anything. They might just contain a single word or even a symbol (perhaps an "up" arrow). Whenever you come across one of your prayer reminders, you stop for a brief moment to pray. Some people put prayer reminders in their lunch box. Some people place a prayer reminder on the mirror in their bathroom. Some people place a prayer reminder on the stick shift of their car. Some people put a prayer reminder on their coat rack near the front door. Some people attach a prayer reminder on their computer screen at home or at work. Some place a prayer reminder in their refrigerator. These reminders are meant to trigger quick, brief, honest prayers of love and devotion to God—a reminder that we live in God's presence wherever we find ourselves.

Praying the News

One of the ways that we can expand our prayer life (particularly our prayers of intercession) is by praying through the news. As we watch the news on television or read the newspaper, we can pray. We can lift up those situations and the people involved in prayer.

There is an excellent website called Newseum that allows you to see the front pages of newspapers from around the world. Go to www.newseum.org and click on the "Today's Front Pages" button on the right hand column of the site and then search for a local newspaper or if you are traveling or abroad, a newspaper from your hometown.

Praying in the Morning

Many people find it helpful to spend the first few moments of their day recognizing the presence of God through prayer. As they awake and while they are still under the covers, they greet God in their own quiet way. They thank God for the protection of the night. They dedicate themselves and this new day of opportunities to God. They think through their daily schedule and they ask God to be present in each moment. They pray that God will make God's presence known in their busy-ness. And they pray that God will be made known through them as they interact with others. Praying in the morning, while you are still in bed, is a great way to start your day.

Praying in the Evening

Another time that people find conducive to intentional and focused prayer is at the end of the day, just as they are about to get in bed and close their eyes to sleep. Many people will speak to God about the important people in their life. They will pray for family and friends, neighbors and co-workers. They might also pray for people with whom they had come into contact during the day. Some people spend time reflecting on the events of the day, thanking God for those moments when they felt blessed and confessing those times when they shut God out or failed to live rightly. Whatever you pray for during this time, consider offering yourself to God once again. Ask God to give you restful and re-energizing sleep. And pray that God will help you wake mindful of God's presence.

Mealtime Prayers

Here are a sampling of common mealtime prayers:
Come Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.

Loving and gracious God, we thank you for the food before us, the friends beside us, the love between us, and your presence among us. Amen.

God is great. God is good. Let us thank God for our food. By God's hand we all are fed. Give, O Lord, our daily bread. Amen.

The following prayer is meant to be sung to the tune of *Old Hundred*; commonly known as our Doxology.
*Be present at our table, Lord.
Be here and everywhere adored.
These mercies bless and grant that we
may strengthened for thy service be. Amen.*