

# Teaching People How to Pray

Prayer is merely talking with God. God wants to converse with His children. Prayer is a wonderful privilege that we enjoy as God's children. Even though prayer is easy to do and available 24-7, we should not take prayer for granted.

Hebrews 4:16 states: **Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

## Types of Prayers

There are formal and informal prayers. One type is not better than the other. There is a time and place for both formal and informal prayer and we should teach both types to our students.

- Formal prayer

Formal prayers usually begin with a salutation and end with a closing and the word "Amen".

I Corinthians 14:16

**Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?**

Amen means "may it be so" and signifies agreement with the prayer or thought. The word, "Amen" is used 27 times in the New Testament at the closing of a prayer or thought. John, used this term in Revelation 1:7 **BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.**

Formal prayers include:

1. Pastoral prayer is where a pastor, elder or member of the congregation stand up in the service and lead in prayer.
2. Prayer before a Sunday School class, small group, junior church, etc.
3. Congregational prayer where members of the congregation join together in praying.
4. Personal prayer can also be formal in nature
5. Family prayer around the dining room table for example.

- Informal prayer

Informal prayer is carrying on a conversation with God. It could be called conversational prayer. God will hear us even when we don't use a formal address or a closing. Sometimes it is beneficial not to use these things especially if we are in an attitude of prayer throughout the day.

I Thessalonians 5:17 **pray without ceasing;**

## Content

The content of our prayers includes 4 areas. We should teach our students to include these four areas in our pray life. It is helpful to use the following acronyms when doing so.

### CATS

- **C**onfession—stating our need of God and admitting our sins to God I John 1:9
- **A**doration—Praising and expressing our love for God
- **T**hanksgiving—I Thessalonians 5:18  
in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
- **S**upplication—asking for both physical and spiritual help.  
We need to stress to our students that it is okay to ask for physical things, but our emphasis should be on spiritual help. What is more important—Our physical health or our spiritual health? Our spiritual health will matter for all eternity.

### ACTS

- Adoration
- Confession
- Thanksgiving
- Supplication

I personally like the CATS arrangement better, because if we have unconfessed sin, we need to take care of that first. Psalm 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

Philippians 4:4-7

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Pour out your heart to God.

Psalm 62:8 Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah.

This means to tell God whatever is on your heart or upsetting you. God knows all of your thoughts anyway. We are not better Christians by not sharing our doubts and fears with God. In fact, the opposite is true.

Psalm 139:1-6

O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
You understand my thought from afar.

<sup>3</sup> You scrutinize my path and my lying down,  
And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Even before there is a word on my tongue,  
Behold, O LORD, You know it all.

<sup>5</sup> You have enclosed me behind and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> *Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
It is *too* high, I cannot attain to it.

## Format

Pray to God the Father

In the name of Jesus Christ—through Him

John 15:16

You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

The Holy Spirit helps us pray

Romans 8:26

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;

## Positions

What position should our body be in when we pray?

The position of our heart is much more important.

Psalms 51:17

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Some of the positions that people use are:

- Kneeling
- Fall on our face
- Standing, raising hands, looking up toward Heaven—This was used to receive the gifts that God gives or to surrender to God
- Eyes closed
- Hands folded
- Heads bowed

The last 3 are most often used with children although adults may use them also except when driving—it is not recommended.

These last 3 positions are used in children's classes so that they are not tempted to be distracted and can focus on the prayer.

The position of the body is what you feel most like doing in your prayer. God does not hear better when we are in one position over another. I can no longer kneel in prayer without causing excruciating pain. It is foolish of me to do that and God is not pleased with foolishness. We cannot make ourselves more worthwhile to God by the position of our prayer. Praying at work should not be done for others to see although when we pray before eating, it would be perfectly alright to bow, close our eyes, and even fold our hands as long as we are not doing it to be seen of people to show how religious we are.

Matthew 6:4-6

<sup>5</sup> "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

## Teaching Prayer

The best way to teach prayer is by example. That being said, we still need to teach students about prayer and how to pray. In order for students to learn to pray the students must pray. Experience is the best teacher. We learn by doing far better than we do by hearing or seeing. The format is not important and we should teach students the different formats, and why we use them. It is good to even tell children that we are bowing our heads, folding our hands, and closing our eyes while we pray in class so we can focus on prayer.

We should teach about people in the Bible who prayed and how God answers prayer. Students need to know that our prayers go to God not to the ceiling. Popcorn prayer is a good way to introduce students to prayer. Popcorn prayer is a method whereby people pray for one thing and then someone else prays. This takes the pressure off of students when they are praying. Popcorn prayer is a good way to do congregational prayer as well. It prevents people from going on and on in their prayer and giving everyone a chance to participate.

One other method of prayer in children's classes is to hand out paper hands with the parts of prayer written on them such as Thanksgiving. After students have a good understanding of the parts of prayer, are given time to think of what they would like to pray about, then they pray like popcorn prayer. A salutation and closing can also be used with this.

## Answered Prayer

There is a lot of confusion about answered prayer. Here are some of the answers God gives us and we need to teach these to our students:

- **Yes**
- **Not Yet** God's timing is not necessarily our timing. We live in the immediate gratification society. Fast foods, etc. God also does not think of time in the way we do. God is eternal. A 10 year old waiting 2 weeks for Christmas to come seems like a long time. A person in their forties may be thinking that 2 weeks before Christmas is a short time because there is so much to do. II Peter 3:8-9  
<sup>8</sup> But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.
- **No** God usually will not give us something that is not good for us. Romans 8:28  
And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His purpose*.  
We must also ask in faith believing. James 1:6-8  
<sup>6</sup> But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, <sup>8</sup> *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.  
We must also ask in the will of God. James 4:3  
<sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

We also need to teach our students that we need to trust God even if prayers not answered the way we would like. God does not exist to cater to our every whim.