

“Lord, teach us to pray”

Abby Van Solkema

Have you ever thought about how amazing it is that we can pray? How incredible is it that we can come into the presence of God at any time and bring our needs to him? Prayer is a wonderful, miraculous gift of grace that God has given only to his children. Yet even though one of the greatest privileges that we have as children of God is to come to our heavenly Father in prayer, why do we often struggle to pray? Part of the reason we struggle to pray may be that we don't make it a priority in our busy daily lives. But another reason may be that we just don't know how to pray. Learning to pray is an important part of maturing in your Christian life. But if you have not yet established good daily prayer habits, it can be overwhelming to know where to start. Or even if you already pray consistently, you undoubtedly recognize room for improvement.

Although there is much to learn from hearing and reading the prayers of fellow saints, there is no substitute for the instruction that we receive from reading and meditating on the many prayers that

are recorded in Scripture. These are not just prayers of faithful saints who have gone before us, but divinely inspired prayers that have been placed in God's revealed word in order to teach his people. As the One who has given us the right to pray, our heavenly Father also has the right to tell us how we must pray. The Lord's prayer, which Jesus gave to his disciples as a perfect model of how to pray, is the most important of all these prayers. It is the prayer that teaches us how to pray all other prayers. In this month's reading plan, you will go through the various petitions of the Lord's prayer as well as selected prayers spoken by Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Ezra, Daniel, Habakkuk, Jesus, and Paul.

A common theme among the prayers that are recorded in Scripture is that they start out by praising God. The first petition of the Lord's prayer is similarly a request for God's name to be honored and praised. Praise is not only a vital part of prayer, but also the best way to begin. Starting off your prayer by praising God for his character will encourage a humble

mindset as you remember the vast difference between who God is and who you are. Since there is an endless number of things to praise God for, how do you decide what to start with? If you are praying as part of your daily devotions, think especially about what God has revealed about himself in the Bible passage that you just read. Or remember what God has revealed to you about himself through creation recently.

Thanksgiving naturally flows from praise because as we consider who God is from his word and creation, we cannot help but think about what he has done on our behalf. Giving thanks for what God has already accomplished for our salvation and what he continues to do in the lives of his people is another essential part of prayer. Whether we are experiencing sickness or health, accomplishment or loss, joy or sorrow, we are called to give thanks to God for every circumstance of our lives because they are all part of his perfect plan. At times giving thanks will be easier and at times it will be very difficult. But by God's grace we can trust that he is always working for our good even if we cannot see it yet.

Although we have seen that we must come to God humbly, the petitions of the Lord's prayer also remind us that we may come boldly to his throne of grace to ask for what we need. Even though God already knows everything that we need, we

are still called to bring our needs to him in prayer as a confession of our faith, love, and dependence on him. For this reason, petitions are an important part of prayer as well. This is also an area of prayer where selfishness can easily creep in. Are the petitions that you bring to God in prayer only concerned with your goals and comfort in this life, or are you praying for things with eternal value such as spiritual maturity, the glorification of God, and the ability to live out God's purposes? Do you pray only for yourself or for others as well?

One specific petition that we must always include in our prayers is asking for forgiveness for our sins. This is the greatest need of the child of God because it is necessary for peace and fellowship with him. If we do not have forgiveness of sins, we have nothing. This is not to say that God doesn't forgive your sins until you ask him in prayer, because that is not true. But conscious assurance of forgiveness comes by means of true confession in prayer. If you usually just tack on “forgive my sins” as an afterthought at the end of your prayer, try to expand on this. You could confess specific sins that you are aware of, ask God to show you your sin, and pray for the strength to resist sin.

Are you still feeling overwhelmed about how to pray? Let me remind you of a handy acronym that you probably learned

as a child to remember the four elements of prayer that I just went through: ACTS—Adoration (Praise), Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication (Petitions). And let me also remind you of the fact that your prayers will not be perfect, because you are not perfect. But they don't need to be! Do you remember what we learned from Romans 8 last month? Christ is sitting at the right

hand of God making intercession for us (v. 34), and the Holy Spirit also intercedes for us when we pray and works desires in us that are in accordance with God's will (vv. 26–27). As you study various prayers from Scripture this month, ask God to help you to use these as a foundation to build your own prayers on and for growth in your daily communion with him.

Date	Read	Study
Aug 8	Genesis 18:16–33	Abraham dared to intercede on Lot's behalf by appealing to God's righteousness because he had faith in God's character. How does trusting God's character give you confidence in your own prayers?
Aug 9	Exodus 15:1–19	The song of Moses taught the nation of Israel to praise God for his glorious works on behalf of his people. How often do your own prayers include praise to God for his glorious work in your life?
Aug 10	2 Samuel 7:18–24	David's prayer in response to God establishing a covenant with him was one of humility and praise. How do you acknowledge both the greatness of God and your own insignificance when you pray?
Aug 11	2 Samuel 7:25–29	David's prayer also contained petitions that God's will would be done. Why should believers pray that God will carry out his promises even though we already know that he certainly will?
Aug 12	1 Kings 8:22–54	Notice Solomon's posture as he begins his prayer in verse 22 and as he ends his prayer in verse 54. What does this tell us about his attitude as he came before God? What is your posture as you pray?
Aug 13	1 Kings 8:22–54	Forgiveness is a major theme in Solomon's prayer because he knew it was the most important need of the people. Do you recognize the significance of asking for forgiveness in your prayers or simply include it as an afterthought?

Aug 14	2 Chronicles 20:1–12	As Judah faces a terrifying attack from their enemies, Jehoshaphat turns to God in prayer on behalf of the nation. Why can it be difficult to turn to prayer when we are afraid? What are you tempted to trust in instead of God?
Aug 15	Ezra 9	Ezra's prayer for repentance on behalf of the people serves as a reminder that we desperately need the grace of God to battle our own sinfulness. Do you ask God to help you fight against specific sins in your daily prayers?
Aug 16	Psalms 20	David and all those who were gathered for worship offered a prayer for blessing on King David as he led the people. What can you learn from this psalm about how to pray for your spiritual leaders?
Aug 17	Psalms 21	In this psalm, David offers praise and thanksgiving to God for answering his prayer in Psalm 20. Do you ever think back to prayers that God has answered and thank him for answering them?
Aug 18	Psalms 22:1–21	Psalms 22 is David's prayer of lament to God that also foreshadows the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Do you boldly and honestly cry out to God when you are going through difficult suffering?
Aug 19	Psalms 22:22–31	In the second part of this psalm, David goes on to praise God for answering his prayer. How does praising God in your prayers help you to declare his praise to those around you as well?
Aug 20	Psalms 104	This psalm celebrates the power and goodness of God as it is revealed in creation. Can you think of some ways to include what you observe in creation in your prayers?
Aug 21	Daniel 9:1–19	Daniel's prayer for God to end the captivity of Israel is a beautiful example of how to pray. Where do you see the elements of praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petitions in this prayer?
Aug 22	Daniel 9:20–27	God answers Daniel's prayer here by giving a prophecy through the angel Gabriel. What does this prophecy teach you about how all of our prayers will ultimately be answered in an even better way than we can imagine?

Aug 23	Habakkuk 3:1-16	In the final prayer of the book of Habakkuk, the prophet speaks of God's past work as a basis for his praise and trust in God. How does remembering the history of God's faithfulness to his people help you to pray in faith?
Aug 24	Habakkuk 3:17-19	What do the closing verses of Habakkuk's prayer teach you about being content even when God does not answer your prayers by changing your circumstances as you would like him to do?
Aug 25	Matthew 6:5-6	Are you tempted to put a lot of effort into prayers that you say in public while neglecting your personal, private prayers? How would this be an example of hypocrisy?
Aug 26	Matthew 6:7-8	What type of prayer is Jesus warning against here when he mentions "vain repetitions" (v. 7)? How can you keep from falling into a pattern of praying this way?
Aug 27	Matthew 6:8-9	Do you ever think about what a great privilege it is to call God "Father"? How does knowing that you are a beloved child of God affect how you approach him in prayer?
Aug 28	Matthew 6:9	What does it mean to "hallow" God's name? Why is it so important that this petition is first in the Lord's prayer?
Aug 29	Matthew 6:10	What is God's kingdom? What exactly are you asking for when you pray for God's kingdom to come?
Aug 30	Matthew 6:10	Do your prayers reflect a desire for your will to be done or God's will to be done? How will a desire for God's will to be done show itself in your daily life?
Aug 31	Matthew 6:11	Why does Jesus teach us to pray "this day" for our "daily" bread? Why can it be so difficult to recognize that we are completely dependent upon God to provide even our most basic needs?
Sep 1	Matthew 6:12	Does this petition mean that when we forgive others it ensures that God will forgive us? If not, what is the meaning of this phrase?
Sep 2	Matthew 6:13	Do you have a certain person, situation, or thing that is especially tempting to you? As you pray this petition for God to deliver you from temptation and evil, are you willing to cut that temptation out of your life?

Sep 3	Matthew 6:13	What is significant about the fact that the Lord's prayer begins and ends with seeking the glory of God? Do your prayers also follow this pattern?
Sep 4	John 17	What does Jesus' prayer here reveal about the relationship between the Father and the Son? What do your prayers reveal about your relationship with your heavenly Father?
Sep 5	John 17	What a comfort it is to know that Jesus prays for his people! What encouragement does this give you in your own prayer life to know that Jesus is continually interceding for you in heaven?
Sep 6	Colossians 1:1-8	Paul repeatedly thanked God and prayed for the saints in Colossae even though he had never met most of them (v. 3). How often do you pray for other believers who are outside of your local church?
Sep 7	Colossians 1:9-14	What does Paul specifically pray for the saints at Colossae here to help them deal with the attacks of false teachers? How can you include these petitions in your own prayer?