
Everyone else knows how to pray

You are not alone if you think this. Prayer is something we are often not taught. How often do we sit or kneel in church looking at other people and wondering what it is they are doing in their silent prayer? They always look so holy. And here we are, trying to say something to God . . .

Don't give up

Prayer is like every human skill. It is something that we need to learn how to do. We can use books, or ask a friend, or seek the guidance of a priest. But, in many ways, prayer is something that we do have to find out about for ourselves. God has made us all different, and so we will all pray differently. We will also pray differently in different situations.



What is prayer?

Prayer is the way that we keep in touch with God. Many people think they can change God: 'If I ask really nicely, then God will do what I want.' For others, prayer is a form of magic: 'If I say it in the right way, then God will answer.' Neither of these is true. Prayer is the way in which we open up to God, so that God can work in us. And God does always answer, although not always in the way we want.

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What is prayer like?

If you love someone, you keep in touch. Prayer is the same. If we love God, we stay in touch. We talk to God and we listen to God. It's a conversation.

Getting in touch

To begin our conversation with God we need to get ready: to come consciously into God's presence, to sit or kneel in a way that is at once comfortable and attentive. Then we need to calm down. Normally our minds are full of distractions; thoughts just keep happening. One way of calming down is to listen to our breathing, the regular pattern of it. Another way is to repeat over and over, 'Be still and know that I am God.' After a while, we settle down, our minds are less full, and then we are ready to pray.

Getting through

When we are calm, then we can start to pray. Sometimes this means continuing to listen, just letting the awareness of God enfold us, like loving arms – we don't need to say anything else, the contact is enough. At other times, we need to say something. This can be anything: 'Dear Father . . .' or 'Hello, God, it's me again . . .' If you are going to say something (whether aloud or silently), then say what you want to say. God doesn't stand on ceremony.

Having the conversation

We need to take time to say what we want: 'Thank you.' 'Sorry.' 'Guess what?' 'I love you.' Take time to listen – to your breathing, to your thoughts and feelings. Be aware of yourself and don't push it. Give God time to speak to you. Conversations take time . . . and patience.

Keep in touch

Traditionally, Christians pray every morning and evening. The more we are in touch, the better it gets. The more time we take, the more rewarding it can be. As we pray regularly, the more natural prayer becomes.

FURTHER READING

George Guiver, *Everyday God* (1994)

What a friend we have in
Jesus,
all our sins and griefs
to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often
forfeit!
O what needless pain we bear!
All because
we do not carry
everything to
God in prayer.

peace

Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819-86)

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