

HOW DO I PRAY?

Help!



A JESUS-CENTERED GUIDE



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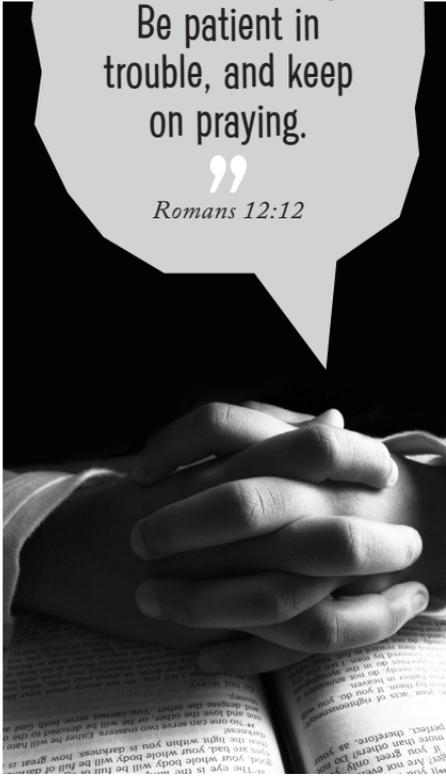


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“
Rejoice in
our confident hope.
Be patient in
trouble, and keep
on praying.

”
Romans 12:12





INTRODUCTION

Everyone tells you that you *should* pray.

And you *want* to pray.

Really, you do.

But while others blissfully recount how “Jesus told me...” or “God soothed my soul when...” you mostly have this to report: “I fell asleep.”

So what’s the story? Is everyone else lying...or is there a secret about prayer that you don’t know? Something that would help you have a prayer life that actually has a pulse?

We talked with people who have meaningful, authentic prayer lives and summarized their advice for you here in this handy little guide to prayer.

Some of it you’ve heard before—but never quite like this. And some of what our friends have shared will surprise you...in a good way.

Just do this for us—and for yourself as well: Be willing.

Be willing to rethink what prayer is and how it fits into your life.

Be willing to experiment a bit.

And be willing to be honest—because whatever else prayer is, it *must* be honest. Prayer is a place to

meet Jesus...but it's a place where there's no room for hiding.

Though it *is* a place with ample room to talk, laugh, and play.

So get ready to actually *enjoy* prayer and to experience it in a way you've not experienced it before.



WHAT IS PRAYER, ANYWAY?

Imagine for a moment you've stepped through the looking glass into a perfect garden oasis.

Fragrant blossoms and fruit trees perfume the air. A cool evening breeze whispers through leaves and tall grass as, above, a slowly sinking sun paints delicate clouds a thousand shades of gold.

Your senses are overwhelmed as you turn slowly in a circle, taking it all in. You've simply never been anywhere this beautiful, never imagined anywhere could *be* this beautiful.

And then you see them, stepping out from behind a cascade of tall flowers—a man, a woman, and, walking between them, the God of the universe.

They're talking as they walk, those three. About the day, the garden, one another. The bright sparkle

of Eve's laughter floats across the garden, and God's voice soothes all who hear it—every plant, insect, and animal resting nearby.

It's a conversation between friends.

A conversation—and a prayer.

No heads are bowed, no eyes are closed (good thing, too—Adam's naked, and that's a rosebush in front of him), and all three are laughing loud and long.

But this is as pure a prayer as you'll find anywhere in the Bible.

God and his creation in joyful, relaxed intimacy—prayer doesn't get any better. Not for Adam and Eve, and not for you.

God's built you for exactly that sort of intimacy with him. He's built you to be his friend. For the two of you to talk, listen, and share the occasional playful nudge in the ribs. To do what friends do.

If that's what you're hungry for—loving, satisfying, joyful conversations with God—*great*. You and God are on the same page.

But what will it take for you to enjoy a walk in the garden with God? To have that sort of intimacy? For prayer to be more than a duty? For you to be able to relax into a natural conversation rather than default to formulas?

It starts with a simple truth: *Prayer is all about relationship.*

Period.

It's not really about how well you talk or even what you talk about. It's who else is in the conversation. That's the most important thing.

If there's a common theme running through the helpful tips about prayer you'll find in this guide, it's this: *Focus on your relationship with God.*

That's what puts you in the garden and keeps you there. That's what brushes the dust off prayer and breathes fresh life into your time with God.

Though there's also this: We can easily get in our own way when it comes to prayer. So let's begin by clearing away a bit of brush that might be crowding the path you want to walk with God.

Let's deal with a few weeds that can choke out your fruitful prayer life.

WEED 1: There's No Point in Praying

If God already knows everything, why bother filing a report? He knows what you need and what's up in your life; he can decide what—if anything—he wants to do about it.

Um...remember how prayer is all about relationship?

That's why God wants the communication with you—because of your friendship. True, you probably won't say or do anything that surprises God, but he's interested in your take on things. You're in this relationship together, and God gives you a tremendous amount of respect as you navigate life.

Look, intimacy is scary. That's one reason there's so little of it.

And intimacy with God is scary, too, at least at first. What will he do if you tell him what's really going on? What's actually bubbling beneath the surface?

What if God knew what you were *really* thinking?

Spoiler alert: He does know...and he loves you anyway. He not only loves you, he *likes* you—and calls you his friend. Now and then, when you're praying, God slides a glance over at an angel, nods your direction, and says, "That one? That's some of my best work right there."

And *that's* the point of praying: To delight God. To deepen your friendship with him. And to invite him to speak into your life.

Because that's what friends do.

WEED 2: Prayer Is Boring

Can't argue with you there: Reciting words at the ceiling is about as boring as boring gets.

But having a conversation with God? One in which you're both talking about what's most important to you? That's anything *but* boring—and exactly where you're headed.

So no matter what your past experiences with prayer have been, please be willing to engage in prayer again—minus the baggage you usually haul along with you when you pray.

Set aside all the “shoulds” that attach to prayer like barnacles clinging to a boat. Scrape off the expectations about how you should pray, when you should pray, and why you should pray.

Toss all the formulas and recipes overboard and be willing to consider prayer from a new point of view—one that's all about a friendship with God. One that centers on Jesus.

And while you're busy scrubbing your prayer deck clean, deep-six any shame and guilt you feel about how your prayer life has looked in the past. There's nothing beneficial about guiltling yourself into having a conversation with God.

And it's hard to picture God getting all excited and tingly about receiving a distracted, obligatory call.

Prayer boring? Not the way *you'll* be praying.

WEED 3: Prayer Doesn't Work

Depending on what you expect prayer to accomplish, you're right.

But you're also wrong.

Prayer was never intended to be measured by how many requests you were granted after you ran your list by God. Or by how many miracles were delivered when only God's intervention could fix what was broken.

Prayer is a relationship...a friendship with God.

If you and God are communicating, prayer is working.

We'll dive deeper into what it means for prayer to "work," but for now let's consider who's on the other end of the line when you pray.

A good
prayer life
isn't about
how you
pray.

It's about
who you're
praying
to.

Help! How Do I Pray? is a portable, practical guide that takes the guilt and intimidation out of prayer by replacing how-to recipes and formulas with a focus on *who* you're praying to: Jesus.

This guide will help you:

- Be freed from the guilt of not praying “the right way.”
- Experience greater confidence as prayer moves from dutiful and boring to natural and effortless, like talking to a friend.
- Find easy, doable ideas for fresh ways to pray.
- Explore Scripture references that seamlessly connect prayer to Bible reading.
- Use journaling opportunities to demonstrate how your prayer life has deepened.

Help! How Do I Pray? is part of the **Jesus-Centered Guide** series for people wanting to grow in their relationship with Jesus, including helpful instruction on reading the Bible, knowing God's will, and prayer. Collect and share the whole set.

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