



# The Basics of Life in Christ



## Week Eight:

Pray my Life—Practices  
that lead us to Pray  
without Ceasing





## **Introduction: A Formula or a Conversation?**

When I was a new Christian, prayer was a bit of an enigma. It seemed (and often still seems) something totally foreign to modern life. When someone would tell me to “sit and pray,” I could understand the “sit” but not so much the “pray.” It was almost like a first-date: there would be one or two good points, but the rest was sort of awkward.

I knew I needed prayer. The problem was, I felt as though I *needed* to know how to pray before I could pray at all. And so I read my Dad’s seminary books, and learned several different formulas (ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication; CATS: Confession, Adoration, Thanksgiving, Supplication; and so on). I loved these simple tricks; I often still follow them.

But as I started to actually pray more, I noticed something about these formulas. They served, in my life, to make me *feel* like I was praying. Recitations of specific words (“I praise you”; “I thank you for”) became for me the ultimate test of the quality of my prayer. While in the beginning I didn’t know how to pray, now I had filled my prayer time with prayer-sounding words. But was I actually praying?

Adele Calhoun writes that “*prayer* is a word that describes a relationship” (SDH 231). *That’s* what I missed as a new Christian. It wasn’t that the formulas were all wrong. It was that to me, they were the beginning and end of the whole process. What really made prayer click for me was recognizing that the *reason* we pray is actually to spend time with and converse with God. Just saying the right words, or having the proper roadmap to follow, isn’t the sign that prayer is taking place. “Prayer,” Calhoun continues, “is sustained less by duty than by a desire to connect and grow in intimacy and communion with the [Trinity].”

This realization has dramatically enhanced my prayer life. I’ve found myself more easily led into prayer (and more often) by the recognition that I do really desire to know and commune with God, that his presence is a delight and a treasure, and that in the Spirit that presence is always with me. So now, when I use the formulas, they have new life, because the emphasis is not so much “*I* praise you,” but rather it is “I praise *you*.”

## **Connection Issues**

*Q: In what ways do people struggle with prayer? Why is it a challenge?*

There are many challenges to prayer in a world like ours:

- **Naturalism:** Nothing happens in the world that isn't instantly and scientifically explainable.
- **Individualism:** Life is about my concerns, interests, and enjoyment.
- **Consumerism:** Life is about what you can get out of every experience.
- **Compartmentalization:** Everything in life has its "box."
- **Secularism:** Life without God is not only livable but preferable.

When Jesus taught us to pray, however, he said:

Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,  
 hallowed be your name.  
 Your kingdom come,  
 your will be done,  
     on earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread,  
 and forgive us our debts,  
     as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
 And lead us not into temptation,  
     but deliver us from evil.”

(Matthew 6:9-13)

*Q: How does Jesus' prayer fight against the challenges to prayer listed above?*

**Praying My Life:** Practices that teach us to live lives of constant, soulful, and transforming prayer (Phil. 4:4-7)

Question for Reflection: *On a scale of one to ten, how satisfying is your recent prayer life? Looking at the list above, how have these aspects of modern life contributed to that?*

---

---

---

---

## **Desires that Lead us to Pray our Lives**

As we've said before, the beginning of pursuing the spiritual life is simply taking the time to recognize what we desire, and following that desire to God's throne.

I want...

*...to pray a simple, intimate prayer of heartfelt desire before God (Breath Prayer)*

*...to quiet the heart and rest in God alone (Centering Prayer)*

*...to develop an open, restful receptivity to the Trinity that enables me to always be with God just as I am*  
(Contemplative Prayer)

*...to talk naturally and unselfconsciously to God in group prayer times with others* (Conversational Prayer)

*...to let go of an appetite in order to seek God on matters of deep concern for other, myself and the world*  
(Fasting)

*...to stop my work and pray throughout the day* (Fixed-Hour Prayer)

*...to assist the emotionally broken and wounded as they seek God for the healing only he can give* (Inner-Healing Prayer)

*...to turn my concerns and worries into prayer; to enter God's heart for the world and then pray from there*  
(Intercessory Prayer)

*...to make a quiet, listening pilgrimage to God*  
(Labyrinth Prayer)

*...to quiet the inner and outer noise so I can open my heart and listen for God's voice* (Listening Prayer)

*...to open myself to God through established patterns or gradients of written prayers and readings* (Liturgical Prayer)

*...to take my complaints, anger, sufferings, frustrations and heartaches to God (Prayer of Lament)*

*...to share the journey of prayer with a trusted companion (Prayer Partners)*

*...to allow God to shape my prayer life through the words of Scripture (Praying Scripture)*

*...to rest in God, allowing him to calm and heal my fragmented and distracted self (Prayer of Recollection)*

*...to align myself, while walking in particular places, with Christ and his intercession for the kingdom to come (Prayer Walking)*

*...to welcome Jesus into every part of my life, body, circumstances and relationships (Welcoming Prayer)*

*Q: Do you resonate with these desires? Do they spark any memories, thoughts, or reminders for you?*

## **Spiritual Disciplines For Praying Our Lives**

Breath Prayer	A form of contemplative prayer linked to the rhythms of breathing: (1) breathe in, calling on a biblical name or image of God, and (2) breathe out a simple God-given desire.
---------------	---



Centering Prayer	A form of contemplative prayer where the pray-er seeks to quiet scattered thoughts and desires in the still center of Christ's presence.
Contemplative Prayer	A receptive posture of openness toward God. It is a way of waiting with a heart awake to God's presence and his Word. This kind of prayer intentionally trusts and rests in the presence of the Holy Spirit deep in our own spirit.
Conversational Prayer	Engages two or more people in a shared dialogue with God. Focusing on one topic at a time each participant takes turns praying a few short sentences.
Fasting	The self denial of normal necessities in order to intentionally attend to God in prayer. Bringing attachments and cravings to the surface opens a place for prayer. This physical awareness of emptiness is the reminder to turn to Jesus who alone can satisfy.
Fixed-Hour Prayer	Call for regular and content patterns of attending to God throughout the day.

Inner-healing Prayer	Invites those with emotional wounds to enter the safe and healing presence of Jesus. In this safe place those seeking wholeness and freedom open themselves to listen to Jesus and his word to them.
Intercessory Prayer	Invites us into God's care and concern for us, our families and friends, and the entire world. It is a way we become more aware of God's prayer for a person and join in that intercession.
Labyrinth Prayer	A contemplative spiritual discipline on a simple marked path that is based on the ancient practice of pilgrimage.
Listening Prayer	Allows God to set the agenda for prayer and responds to the word that is given.
Liturgical Prayer	A written or memorized prayer that serves as a framework for individual or corporate worship and devotion.
Prayer of Lament	Ways to approach God with the realities of sorrow, frustration and angst that consume and distract.
Prayer Partners	Two people who agree to support one another and pray together for their own concerns as well as world affairs.

Praying Scripture	Allows God to direct the content of prayer. It opens the heart to praying particular prayers, psalms, teachings and hopes found in the Bible.
Prayer of Recollection	Represents a specifically 'restful attitude' of connecting with the reality that God is in me. As we let go of distractions, this prayer recalls the soul to its true center and identity in Christ.
Prayer Walking	A way of physically walking with Jesus through places that you are concerned about. From the vantage point of proximity, prayers for the kingdom to come are offered to God.
Welcoming Prayer	A way to detach from my need to be secure, liked and in control, and attach to the presence of Jesus instead.

Question for reflection: *Which of these practices inspires you as you think of the desires above? Which could you try this week?*

---

---

---

---

---

## **An Example: Breath Prayer**

**Desire:** to pray a simple, intimate prayer of heartfelt desire before God.

**Definition:** A form of contemplative prayer linked to the rhythms of breathing: (1) breathe in, calling on a biblical name or image of God, and (2) breathe out a simple God-given desire.

Breath Prayer is an ancient form of prayer that has long been a bastion of Eastern Orthodox spirituality. A classic work of Russian spirituality, *the Way of the Pilgrim*, describes the practice:

*Take a seat in solitude and silence. Bend your head, close your eyes and breathing softly, in your imagination, look into your own heart. Let your mind, or rather, your thoughts flow from your head down to your heart and say, while breathing: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” Whisper these words gently or say them in your mind. Discard all other thoughts. Be serene, persevering and repeat them over and over again.*

Breath prayer invites us to still our minds and hearts, to become aware of God's abiding presence, and to breathe in his mercy and love in the midst of our lives.

### **The Practice:**

- 1.** Sit quietly, in solitude if possible.
- 2.** Pay attention to your breathing (similar to the practice of mindfulness). Let your thoughts work their way out of your head.
- 3.** Call to attention a small, loved verse of Scripture or prayer, such as "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me."
- 4.** As you breath slowly, on each inhalation recite the first half of your verse or prayer: "Lord Jesus." On the exhalation, recite the second: "have mercy."
- 5.** Repeat the process as long as you like, breathing in God's presence and love.
- 6.** When you are finished, resolve to live in the new air of God's presence.

Questions for Reflection: *How is breath prayer different from the way we commonly pray? What insights, curiosities, or challenges did it present to you?*

---

---

---

---

---

*Q: Where could you use a simple breath prayer in your daily routine? How might it change how you go through your day?*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Next time:**

**Starting 3/21:** The basics of Sharing Christ: How to Think, Speak, and Act Like Christ for the World.