

Practising Spiritual Disciplines



PRAYER

Submission • Obedience • Presence

Some thoughts to help you pray:

- 1. Prayer begins with God:** God is always the initiator. Without his coming, we would never desire to reach out to him in prayer. Thank God for any stirring in your heart to pray because it is evidence of his work in your life. Ask God to give you a greater hunger and thirst for him (see Matthew 5:6).
- 2. Prayer is about learning how to respond to God:** In his book, *Prayer*, Timothy Keller states: "Our starting point for prayer needs be God's Word." As we listen, study, think, reflect and ponder the Scriptures, there is a response in our hearts and minds—conviction, joy, confusion or an appeal for help. Prayer is a response to God.
- 3. Begin with meditation:** The Book of Psalms—the prayer book of the Bible—does not start with a prayer but meditation. In his book, *Answering God*, Eugene Peterson says: "The Psalms do not begin with a prayer because we are not ready. We are wrapped up in ourselves. We are knocked around by the world. Psalm 1 is preparatory which helps us get ready to pray."
- 4. Praying Scripture:** Responding to the request "Teach us to pray," Jesus shared what has come to be known as the Lord's Prayer (see Luke 11:1). Lingering over each word and phrase of the Lord's Prayer can prepare you for prayer. Start by reflecting on the privilege of calling God Father. Through faith in Jesus Christ you have been adopted into the family of God (see John 1:12). You have a Father who knows your name and the intricate details of your life. Father God is better than the best of earthly fathers. He will never disappoint and he always keeps his promises.
- 5. Pray any part of the Bible:** All Scripture can be used to communicate with God. As you read the Bible (stories, history, poems, parables, etc.) in the presence of God and pay attention to the Spirit, passages that relate to your life, the world and the people you know can be turned into prayer. Over time, it will become natural to immediately turn these thoughts into prayer.
- 6. Prayer requires action:** Thinking about prayer is not praying. Emilie Griffin writes in *Clinging*: "There is a moment between intending to pray and actually praying that is as dark and silent as any moment in our lives. It is the split second between thinking about prayer and really praying. For some of us, this split second may last for decades. It seems the greatest obstacle to prayer is the simple matter of beginning, the exertion of the will, the starting, the acting, the doing."
- 7. Fixed-hour prayer:** David prayed seven times a day (see Psalm 119:164), Daniel prayed three times a day (see Daniel 6:10), and Jesus and his disciples prayed at set hours of the day (see Acts 3:1, 10:3, 9, 30). Schedule times to pray. A five-minute prayer, at set times in the day, will cultivate an awareness of God's presence. In his book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Peter Scazzero states: "Fixed-hour prayers are not meant to add another to-do to your already busy schedules. It is resetting your entire life toward a new destination—God."
- 8. Constant prayer:** Frank Laubach wrote about his attempt to keep God in mind for at least one second of every minute. Christians are called to be in constant prayer (see 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Fixed-hour and constant prayer both begin with a stirred desire from God and involve a human response.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Cut out and keep in your Bible or journal. Allow these verses to mould your idea of prayer.

"Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation" (Luke 11:2-4 *NIV*).

"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psalm 103:1 *KJV*).

"Truly my soul finds rest in God" (Psalm 62:1 *NIV*).

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27 *KJV*).

"The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans" (Romans 8:26-27 *NIV*).

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all" (James 1:5 *NASB*).

"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16 *NIV*).

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7 *NIV*).

My Action Plan

→ Find a space and time to get away and be alone with God (see Matthew 6:6).

→ Speak prayers of praise to God using Psalm 100.

→ Ask God if there is someone with or for whom he wants you to pray.