

Word of God: speak to us. Speak through us. Amen.

Who here feels good about your prayer life?

Who knows what it means to have a prayer life?

That was not a phrase I knew as a child. But I met some evangelical Christians who said you had to have daily devotions. Later I heard it called a “quiet time.” I remember as a 10-year-old trying very hard at this, even forcing my sister to be in a bible club with me that met in my closet. I dragged chairs and even a lamp in there. And when I turned out the lights at night, I convened a prayer meeting under the Covers with Lambie and Tigie, my stuffed animals I’d had since I was one. We had a strict agenda: first we gave thanks, then we asked for blessings. I remember prayer being a “should,” but not a blessing.

There are so many kinds of prayer –

intercessory prayer, centering prayer, contemplative prayer...

Many of us say prayers on the fly all day long.

It’s all good. God likes it when we talk to him.

But if all we do is talk, we’re missing out. Because God wants a relationship with

us, and it’s hard to have a relationship when only one person does all the talking.

Conversation is the best way to build a relationship, right?

If we’re not aware of being in a relationship with God, we can pray our way in.

Prayer is conversation with God. But it’s not a conversation we start.

It’s joining a conversation that’s been going on since before time.

Have you ever lifted the receiver of a landline and heard someone talking?

That’s what it’s like to tune in to prayer...

As we understand God in three persons, this Father, Son and Spirit are in

constant relationship and always communicating, and we’re invited to join in.

God is already speaking to us, and we check in and out.

What happens when we tune in? Jesus exhorted his disciples to pray persistently – don’t hold back asking God for what you need.

When they wanted him to teach them how to pray, he taught them categories –

Who – Our Father, who is holy; God is God and we are not.

Your kingdom come – let God’s reign be established among us.
Your will be done – let the life of the heavenly realms be manifest in this one.
Forgive us, as we forgive others;
Give us what we need for today, not for twenty years, today;
Protect us from having our faith tested beyond its capacity.

That’s one format for prayer. Here’s another: ACTS
Adoration – praise for who you are, qualities, not the same as thanks
Confession – restoring relationship, reconciliation
Thanksgiving – remembering God is in the business of blessing
Supplication – asking for God’s presence and power to come into situations of need.

But a conversation in which we do all the talking isn’t much of a conversation.
The true gift of prayer is a sense of connecting with God and receiving
guidance and a sense of belovedness and connection.

What does Jesus promise will happen when we pray?

He says we won’t receive scorpions or evil or punishment;

misfortune is not from God, though God will be with us in it when it comes.

He doesn’t say we will receive what we ask for....

He says we will receive the Holy Spirit.

It is the Spirit in us who enables us to tune in to that conversation –
and then we begin to hear God’s side of the conversation.

The Spirit is the tuning device.

And what do we experience? Some people receive words in their mind;
some see images; a friend I knew would get song lyrics in answer to prayers.

For me, often, it’s words – one time I settled down to pray.

And the first thing I usually say is, “I’m sorry I’ve been so lousy and irregular
about sitting down to pray...” And this time, I was apologizing again.

And I sensed God say, right away, “You don’t need to say you’re sorry. I love you.

There is nothing you should do or can do to make me love you more -

I already love you the most. You can stop producing, achieving right now,
and I will still love you because I already love you the most.”

Those are words I have never forgotten, and that I’ve often shared with others
who needed to be reminded – If I hadn’t tuned in, I wouldn’t have heard them.

How do we learn to quiet our minds and our spirits so we can listen?

We can use the words that Eli told Samuel to say,

“Speak Lord, for your servant is listening....”

There are many techniques; many meditation techniques came from early Christian prayer practices: slowing your breathing, centering, using a mantra...

I pray in tongues, which is a way of praying in the Spirit.

All we really need to do is ask the Holy Spirit to help us. “How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

The Spirit brings us into that heavenly prayer already going on.

St. Paul wrote to the church in Rome, “We don’t even know how to pray!

The Spirit prays inside us, with sighs too deep for words – and God knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” So we tap into God’s prayer for us and for the world and join that.

All prayer begins with God, and we join in and add, and it returns to God.

Jesus said we should pray for what we want, because we need to express it.

But often we’re asking God to align his will with ours.

When we can move from there into the prayer of the heart, tapping into

God’s prayer for us and for the world, we are aligning our wills with God’s.

God’s prayers for us, God’s prayers for the world are truly blessed.

And God’s prayers are always answered. Amen!

Let’s move now into our prayer time together, and after we’ve gone through our thanksgivings and supplications and confession, let’s try a little listening prayer.

We’ll go into silence and I’ll lead us with a few prompts, and try it on.

Let’s pray, sitting or kneeling.

Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' He said to them, 'When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.'

And he said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him." And he answers from within, "Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

'So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'