

Ten Keys to a Successful Personal Prayer Plan

1. Schedule time to pray each day. The earlier in the day, the better for your day.
2. Select a location that inspires you to pray. Make it a creative, restful and quiet place. It may be as small as a corner with a shelf in your bedroom or a corner of your yard.
3. Set aside a niche for collecting small items that remind you of significant times with God. If you are new to this, the collection can be as simple as a seashell, a rock, or a dried flower.
4. Select a few Christian symbols to inspire you such as a cross, a candle or a Bible.
5. Remove distractions. Tell others that you want 15 minutes alone. You do not need to answer the telephone, pager, or doorbell during this time.
6. Start small, like 15 minutes a day, so that you do not get discouraged. Once you discover the value of this time, you will want to expand it.
7. Try different ways to pray until you find a structure that works for you. Some people like more structure than others.
8. If you have a day where you do not keep your prayer time, do not allow guilt to bury you. Simply plan to pray again tomorrow.
9. Many people find an advantage in being accountable to another person about their prayer plan. Weekly check-ins can help to keep you focused and prevent legalism or apathy.
10. Schedule your prayer time for tomorrow at the end of today's prayers. This helps to prevent you from forgetting this priority in your life.

Faith Practices



“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” —1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Prayer is the way a disciple enjoys an intimate relationship with God. Prayer can be private or public, ritualized or conversational, silent or out loud, spoken or sung, words or action, simple or profound. Through prayer God’s will is discerned and greater clarity is gained for our journey. Prayer is powerful. Indeed, God’s creative, redeeming and healing power is often directed through prayer.

Jesus modeled the power and importance of prayer and provides our inspiration to embrace a prayerful stance toward all moments of life. One of the key ways Jesus showed his love for his Father was by regularly engaging in prayer. Throughout the Gospels we read how Jesus “went up to a mountain to pray” or “knelt down and prayed” or “continued all night in prayer.” As Jesus prayed, he gained a clearer sense of who he was (his identity) and what he was to do (his mission). Before he taught or healed, before choosing the Twelve or submitting his will to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed. Whatever the opportunity or challenge, Jesus turned to his Father first and sought the guidance of God.

Prayer is Adoration (praise, honoring God), Confession (saying “I’m sorry,” acknowledging sin, that “I can’t do it on my own”), Thanksgiving (saying thanks, counting blessings, allowing God’s perspective to shape life) and Supplication (asking for, praying for others, petitionary in character) — ACTS. The Lord’s Prayer and Luther’s interpretation in the Small Catechism provide ample instruction for the content and elements of prayer and a prayerful life.



BRINGING IT HOME

Experts say that a person may speak up to 40,000 words a day. Of course, that number will vary depending on your situation.

Name some of the people with whom you have frequent conversations. Think of some of your favorite words and phrases.

Prayer is a special way to share our thoughts with God. Prayers come in all shapes and sizes. They can be formal or spontaneous, original or borrowed. They can be in print or orally passed down from one generation to the next.

PRAYER = TALKING TO GOD

To pray, just start talking. Or, stop talking and acknowledge God's presence in a moment of silence, like David in Psalm 46:10.

"Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10

Prayer is two-way communication. It involves talking and listening. *Talk about times you have prayed or observed others while they were praying. Name some prayers that are familiar.*

When we pray, our words may be similar to those we use in conversations with others. They might include:

- Words that speak our praise for God's presence and activity.
- Words that ask for God's understanding and forgiveness for mistakes we've made.
- Words that describe the people and things for which we are thankful.
- Special requests for things we'd like God to provide — nice weather, healing and good health, a good attitude and motivation for accomplishing things, food and justice for all people.

Look through the following ideas you can use to nurture prayer in your family. Choose one, two or more. Feel free to adapt them to your situation.

- Pray a prayer of thanks before meals. Whether "one for all or all for one," memorized or spontaneous, long or short, get the good Lord in on it!
- When praying the table prayer, "Come Lord Jesus be our guest, let this food to us be blest," place an extra chair around your table to actually symbolize Jesus' presence. Or use, "Blest be God who is our bread, may the world be clothed and fed. Amen."

- Decide as a family to set aside a minute or two around noon everyday to pray for each other. Whisper quick prayers of thanks or ask for God's presence and support for the others.
- Use "Oh God, thank you. Amen" as a quick table prayer or spontaneous response to special people and things you see in the world.
- Scan your local newspaper for age-appropriate articles that tell of people or situations you can include in your prayers. Consider the lives of the people involved and the feelings they might have and share a prayer for them.

NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!

- As you begin your day, preview your day's activities and pray for the teachers, coworkers and friends you will encounter.
- In times of conflict, stop and take a moment to ask God to help you "let go" and make a fresh new start.
- Set up a space in your home for prayer and meditation.
- Consider praying this prayer together: *Dear Jesus, thank you for my (family member) to live with heart to heart; to hug, to smile, to laugh with. We've been together from the start. And for the times when we forget how special we each are, help us to let go and make a fresh new start! Amen.*
- Make bedtime a time of personal attention and rich conversation. Read, sing and reflect on the joys and frustrations of the day and pray in a conversational way. Encourage all to let go of their worries and believe that God will hold them.
- Offer "instant prayers" or brief, spontaneous prayers as you and your family encounter joys and challenges through out the day— "Lord, help Mary with her test today. Amen" or "Thanks for the sunset!"
- Use Luther's *Small Catechism* as a guide for prayer. Review the meaning of the Lord's Prayer to gain a greater understanding of how Jesus taught us to pray.
- Let the sight of a police car, fire truck or ambulance prompt you to say quick prayers for the people involved.
- Enrich your leave-taking or times to say goodbye with this prayerful exchange: *"The Lord be with you. And also with you."*
- Nurture natural ways to pray. God doesn't need to hear grand and glorious words. God longs to hear our voice anytime, anywhere and for any reason.