

## PRAYER

**NOW HOPE THAT IS SEEN IS NOT HOPE. FOR WHO HOPES FOR WHAT IS SEEN? BUT IF WE HOPE FOR WHAT WE DO NOT SEE, WE WAIT FOR IT WITH PATIENCE.**

**LIKEWISE THE SPIRIT HELPS US IN OUR WEAKNESS; FOR WE DO NOT KNOW HOW TO PRAY AS WE OUGHT, BUT THAT VERY SPIRIT INTERCEDES WITH SIGHS TOO DEEP FOR WORDS. AND GOD, WHO SEARCHES THE HEART, KNOWS WHAT IS THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT, BECAUSE THE SPIRIT INTERCEDES FOR THE SAINTS ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD. ROMANS 8:24-27**

**PRAYER** is the word we use to describe talking with God. Sometimes we might imagine prayer like being on one end of a telephone, dialing an unknown number that connects far away or up in the clouds. The connection might be scratchy and sometimes we find ourselves shouting, “can you hear me now?” as we change position, shouting into the phone hoping that God will hear how we’re doing. The problem with this image of prayer is that it assumes God doesn’t know what’s happening until you call. The image also suggests that God will continue not to know what’s happening if the call drops or the line get fuzzy.

If prayer is a matter of wishfully hoping that God can hear as we wonder if we’ve said the magic words to get God to listen, then we’ve presumed God is distant, detached, and wholly unaware of what is happening on the ground and in our lives. Prayer is then reduced to summary headlines and soundbites of the troubles, griefs, and hopes that come to us daily – news that we hope God tuned in for at some point.

Yet, this is not God’s way. Scripture shares how we can expect to see, hear, feel, and know that God is not far away at an unknown address, but close. God is next to you, experiencing your day alongside you in real time and with real care.

Why pray if God is so near? Prayer is a conversation that recognizes God by your side, acknowledging you as you point and say, “God, look at *that*...” God is with you in all that you see, hear, touch, and do, so your prayers don’t have to travel across distances to get to their intended recipient. There’s no scratchy connections or unknown numbers to manage when it comes to God.

The verse in the box above helps us see that we might not always have the right words to describe how exactly we’re feeling or doing. Not everyone uses exact or eloquent words to express what’s going on in their hearts and souls. Sometimes we don’t even know what to say, and so Romans 8:24-27 tells us that even our sighs are received by God as prayers. The good news is this: God hears you, no matter what. Prayer is simply communicating however you can to God that you need help, hope, love, care, guidance, faith, and more in what’s happening now and the things to come.



## HOW TO PRAY

Prayer happens in many different places, using different kinds of postures, and different styles of speaking.

Prayer can be out loud or silent.

Prayer can be active or still.

Prayer can use someone else's words or freely speaking your own.

### **You can pray:**

Sitting	Hands folded	In a car
Standing	Hands lifted high	At school
Kneeling	Hands relaxed	At the gym
Laying down	Head bowed	At work
Alone	Head up	At home
With others	Head on a pillow	At a dinner table

...and more. These suggestions are not exhaustive!

## EXAMPLES OF WAYS YOU MIGHT TRY PRAYING

### **Prayers of the People**

In worship, many churches offer Prayers of the People (sometimes called *Prayers of Intercession*). During this time, we offer petitions for circumstances and people that we have noticed need God's special attention. We pray for:

- CHRIST'S CHURCH, ITS MEMBERS, AND ITS PURPOSE
- THE NATIONS AND ALL IN AUTHORITY
- THE WELFARE OF THE WORLD
- THE CONCERNS OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY
- THOSE WHO SUFFER AND THOSE IN ANY TROUBLE
- THE DYING AND THE DEAD

**EXAMPLE OF PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:**

Leader: In peace, we pray to you, Lord God.

Hear us, Lord.

All: Your mercy is great.

For all people in their daily life and work;

FOR OUR FAMILIES, FRIENDS, AND NEIGHBORS, AND FOR THOSE WHO ARE ALONE.

Hear us, Lord; **Your mercy is great.**

For this community, the nation, and the world;

FOR ALL WHO WORK FOR JUSTICE, FREEDOM, AND PEACE.

Hear us, Lord; **Your mercy is great.**

For the just and proper use of your creation;

FOR THE VICTIMS OF HUNGER, FEAR, INJUSTICE, AND OPPRESSION.

Hear us, Lord; **Your mercy is great.**

For all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble;

FOR THOSE WHO MINISTER TO THE SICK, THE FRIENDLESS, AND THE NEEDY.

Hear us, Lord; **Your mercy is great.**

For the peace and unity of the Church of God;

FOR ALL WHO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL, AND ALL WHO SEEK THE TRUTH.

Hear us, Lord; **Your mercy is great.**

For Michael Curry our presiding bishop and Dorsey McConnell, our bishop; and for all bishops, priests, deacons, and other ministers;

FOR ALL WHO SERVE GOD IN HIS CHURCH.

Hear us, Lord; **Your mercy is great.**

For the special needs and concerns of this congregation.

THE PEOPLE MAY ADD THEIR OWN PETITIONS

Hear us, Lord; **Your mercy is great.**

## Help, Thanks, Wow

Author Anne Lamott<sup>1</sup> explains that prayers fit into three categories:

### HELP + THANKS + WOW

Using these three categories, one way of praying may sound like this:

- **START:**  
Call on God using God's name and sometimes adding a description about God:
  - O God
  - Loving God
  - Gracious God
  - Almighty God
  - Heavenly Father
  - God
- **HELP:**  
Tell God about people, places, and things that need God's help. Who or what around you could especially use God's attention? Ask for help specifically for your family member's lows.
- **THANKS:**  
Thank God for all the good, kind, and generous things you've experienced in your own life or noticed in the lives of others. Give thanks specifically for your family member's highs.
- **Wow:**  
Express wonder to God by naming things that you don't understand and for which you'd like God's guidance. Ask God to open the eyes of your heart to take in the world God has made for you and all people.
- **CLOSE:**  
Conclude your prayer "...in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

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<sup>1</sup> Lamott, Anne. *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*. New York: Penguin, 2012.

## The Five Finger Prayer

This is a popular method of prayer in many different Christian traditions. Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic church offered an especially clear explanation for this method:

- **THE THUMB:**  
This is the closest finger to you, so begin by prayer for those who are closest to you. They are the people who are easiest to remember. To remember to pray for our loved ones is a sweet celebration.
- **THE INDEX FINGER:**  
Pray for those who teach you, instruct you, and heal you. They need the support and wisdom to show direction to others. Always keep them in your prayers.
- **THE TALLEST FINGER:**  
It reminds us of our leaders, those who govern, and those who have authority. They need God's guidance.
- **THE RING FINGER:**  
Even though it may surprise you, it is our weakest finger. It should remind us to pray for the weakest, the sick, or those plagued by problems. They need your prayers.
- **THE SMALLEST FINGER:**  
Your pinky should remind you to pray for yourself. When you are done praying for the four other groups, you will be able to see your own needs but in the proper perspective, and you will be able to pray for your own needs in a better way.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Catholic Online. "Pope Francis' Five Finger Prayer."  
<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=3396> (accessed July 10, 2014).

## How to FAITH 5

This is a helpful way of connecting with loved ones in faith and prayer every evening at home called FAITH 5<sup>3</sup>.

### **SHARE + READ + TALK + PRAY + BLESS**

Designate a special place to meet with your family (meaning the anyone you live with or other loved ones) for 10-15 minutes during your day (during or after a meal, just before bedtime, etc.). Remove technology and distractions so you can focus on each other.

1. **Share** your highs and lows from the day. What was a positive part of the day? What was a difficult part of the day? Repeat everyone else's highs and lows as needed to make sure you heard them correctly.
2. **Read** a key verse or story from God's Word (the Bible). You may use the "Reflect" section of your weekly lesson.
3. **Talk** together about what God is trying to say to you with these words. How does the verse connect to your highs and lows?
4. **Pray** for one another by name, thanking God for the highs and asking for help with the lows.
5. **Bless** one another. To bless one another is a physical sign of God's love and yours. Draw a cross on one another's foreheads or hand while saying something as simple as:
  - God bless you. I love you. Goodnight.
  - Jesus loves you and so do I.
  - [Name] child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever!
  - There is nothing you can ever say or do that will ever stop God's heart and my heart from loving you.
  - Create your own words of blessing as a sign of God's love and your love.

<sup>3</sup> Melheim, Richard Alan. *Holding Your Family Together: 5 Simple Steps to Help Bring Your Family Closer to God and Each Other*. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013.

