

follow Prayer: Introduction Parts 1 & 2

Introduction to Prayer

Welcome to *Follow Prayer*. In this first video, we explore the foundations of prayer, addressing common perceptions, struggles, and the essence of Christian prayer. Below, you'll find key points, questions, scriptures, and quotes to guide your reflection and discussion.

Everyone Struggles With Prayer

- Prayer can be difficult due to cultural influences, personal expectations, or a lack of teaching on how to pray. If you've felt guilty about not praying enough, you're not alone. Welcome to the table!
 - Feeling distant from God is a common part of the wrestling of prayer.
 - Struggling with prayer is not failure; it is a normal part of following Jesus.
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Prayer is Fundamental to Following Jesus

Jesus modeled prayer consistently throughout His life:

- **At His baptism:** Jesus prayed (Luke 3:21).
- **Before choosing the 12 disciples:** He prayed all night (Luke 6:12-13).
- **In busy times:** He rose early to pray (Mark 1:35).
- **After ministering to crowds:** He withdrew to pray (John 6:15).
- **With and for His disciples:** He prayed often (John 17).
- **In Gethsemane:** He prayed intensely before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:36-46).
- **On the cross:** He spoke to His Father (Luke 23:34, 46).

Key Insight: If we want to follow Jesus, prayer is foundational. Jesus did not only pray in crises; He regularly withdrew from activity and attention to be with the Father.

What is Prayer?

Prayer is primarily about relationship, and from that relationship comes formation (becoming like Jesus). Prayer is not mainly a technique for getting things from God.

Therefore, we encourage you to think about prayer being **relational** and **formational**. A way to connect with God and be shaped by Him.

- **Dallas Willard:** “Prayer is simply talking to God about what we are doing together, as friends.”
- **C.S. Lewis:** “Prayer is not about getting God to do our bidding, but about coming into communion with Him.”

Prayer is about being with God, walking with Him, talking with Him, and being guided by Him. Through this relationship, we are formed to become more like God.

The long-term goal is continual communion with God. We grow toward a life in which part of us remains consciously connected to God throughout the day (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Who is This God We Pray To?

Christian prayer is Trinitarian, directed to God the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity

- **Three persons, one God:** A community of love.
 - God is not solitary or distant, but eternally Father, Son, and Spirit in loving fellowship.
 - Prayer is an invitation into the love already shared within the Trinity.
- **Rublev’s Icon:** Imagine taking your seat at the table of the Trinity, welcomed into divine fellowship.

Trinitarian Prayer:

- **To the Father:** Jesus teaches us to pray, “Our Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:9).
- **Through the Son:** We pray in Jesus’ name, by His authority and merit, through His work on the cross.
- **In the power of the Spirit:** The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. We are not alone when we pray (Ephesians 6:18).

Key Scriptures on Trinitarian Prayer

- **The Holy Spirit**

Romans 8:26-27 (NIV):

“In the same way, 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. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.”

- The Holy Spirit is with us, interceding and empowering our prayers. We are not alone.

- **The Son**

Romans 8:1 (NIV):

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...”

Romans 8:38-39 (NIV):

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Hebrews 4:14-16 (NIV):

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 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.”

- Praying in Jesus’ name means approaching God with confidence, knowing nothing separates us from His love.

- **The Father**

Luke 15:17-24 (NIV):

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is

alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.”

- Prayer is often the moment we “come to our senses” in the middle of daily life.
- When we feel unworthy, prayer reminds us that the Father’s posture is welcome, not rejection.
- The Father is loving and compassionate, running to welcome us.

Reflection:

- “When he came to his senses...” (Luke 15:17). In prayer, we come to our senses and find a Father who runs to us.
- **Anthony De Mello:** “Behold God beholding you and smiling.”

Summary: We pray to a loving Father who desires a relationship with us, shaping us to be like Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Reflective Quotes

1. **Ruth Burrows, *Essence of Prayer*:**

“Prayer has far more to do with what God wants to do in us than with our trying to ‘reach’ or ‘realize,’ still less ‘entertain,’ God in prayer. This truth eliminates anxiety and concern as to the success or non-success of our prayer, for we can be quite certain that, if we want to pray and give the time to prayer, God is always successful and that is what matters... What we think of as our search for God is, in reality, a response to the divine Lover drawing us to himself. There is never a moment when divine Love is not at work... This work is nothing other than a giving of the divine Self in love. The logical consequence for us must surely be that our part is to let ourselves be loved, let ourselves be given to, let ourselves be worked upon by this great God and made capable of total union with Him.”

2. **James Finley, *Merton’s Palace of Nowhere*:**

“Prayer, understood as the distilled awareness of our entire life before God, is a journey forward, a response to a call from the Father to become perfectly like his Son through the power of the Holy Spirit. But this journey forward can also be seen as a kind of journey backward, in which we seek to gain access to the relationship Adam had with God. In prayer we journey forward to our origin. We close our eyes in prayer and open them in the pristine moment of creation. We open our eyes to find God, his hands still smeared with clay, hovering over us, breathing into us his own divine life, smiling to see in us a reflection of himself. We go to our place of prayer confident that in prayer we transcend both place and time.”

The Emotional Pressure of Prayer

- Prayer is not a performance. You do not need impressive words.
 - Prayer is a surrendering of your attention to God. Stepping outside of the noise of life and letting God love you.
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How to Use This Follow Prayer Module

This series includes prayer exercises to help you grow in your relationship with God. Here's how to approach them:

1. **Set Aside Time and Place:**
 - Schedule daily time for prayer. Write “God” in your calendar, not “Prayer,” to emphasize relationship over obligation.
 - **St. Francis de Sales:** “Everyone of us needs half an hour of prayer each day, except when we are busy—then we need an hour.”
 - When life gets busy, prioritize prayer even more.
2. **Try Each Exercise:**
 - Experiment with each prayer practice for about a week.
 - Don't expect to resonate with every method—think of them as tools in your toolbelt or musical scales to practice.
 - Over time, you'll develop your own rhythm of prayer.
3. **Why Focus on Exercises?**
 - **“We learn to pray by praying.”** Start, be intentional, and be consistent. Your relationship with God will grow.
 - **We need prayers wiser than we are:** Prayers with better theology, greater faith, and deeper emotional resonance.

Final Encouragement: This is just the beginning of your prayer journey. Learn to pray by praying and watch your relationship with God blossom.