

Biblical Topics

Lord's Prayer – Prayer

Prayer is an act of worship because thereby we recognize and honor God as our helper in every need. To pray means to talk with God. In prayer we make known to God our wants and needs, our griefs and sorrows and ask for His help. We, however, also praise and thank Him for what He done for us. The value of prayers lies not in their length, number, nor in the correct and polished language. What is vital is that we pray from the heart, earnestly and sincerely.

Luther gives the following example: “When Luther’s puppy happened to be at the table, looked for a morsel from his master, and watched with open mouth and motionless eye, he (Luther) said ‘Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches the meat! All his thoughts are concentrated on the piece of meat. Otherwise he has no thought, wish, or hope.’” (Luther’s Works – Table Talks, May 18, 1532)

- Psalm 19:14: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.
- Matthew 6:7: And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.
- Psalm 10:17: You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
- Isaiah 65:24: Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.

We should be moved to pray because: 1) God commands us to pray and He promises to hear us, 2) We are to pray for our and our neighbor’s need and 3) We are to pray out of gratitude for blessings received. Not to pray is sin (2nd Commandment). The feeling of personal unworthiness should not keep us from praying.

- Matthew 7:7-8:⁷ Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.
- Psalm 50:15: and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.

We should ask for everything that is to the glory of God. We should also ask for our own and neighbor’s welfare, both spiritual and bodily blessings. We pray for forgiveness of our sin, for perseverance in faith and for strength to lead a godly life. We also may pray for temporal blessings. We should never ask that evil may happen to others. We are to pray only for the good of others.

- Philippians 4:6: Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
- Mark 11:24: Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

When we pray for spiritual blessings necessary for our salvation we should ask unconditionally. When we pray for other gifts we should ask that God grant them to us if it is His will. We know that it is His will for us to have faith and be saved eternally. Some earthly blessings we may ask for may not be good for us. Therefore we leave them up to the will of God.

- Luke 11:13: If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!
- Luke 22:42: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."
- Matthew 8:2: A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."
- 1 John 5:14: This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

We should pray 1) thoughtfully, thinking of what we are saying, 2) sincerely, we must mean what we say, 3) with a penitent heart, 4) according to the will of God, 5) in the name of Christ, and 6) with confidence and not doubting.

- John 16:23: In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.
- Matthew 21:22: If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

God answers every proper prayer, but in His own way and at His own time. God answers our prayers but not always in the way we ask or expect. It most certainly will be what is best for us and often much better than for what we had hoped.

- 2 Corinthians 12:8-9: Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.
- John 2:4: "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."
- Isaiah 54:7-8: ⁷"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. ⁸In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the LORD your Redeemer.

We should pray everywhere, especially in private, that is, when we are alone. We should also pray in our family circle, and in public worship. The sanctity of the place does not add value and strength to our prayers. We should not make a public show of our prayers as the Pharisees did.

- 1 Timothy 2:8: I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.
- Matthew 6:5: And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

- Matthew 6:6: But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
- Psalm 26:12: My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the LORD.

We should pray at all times, especially in time of trouble. That does not mean that we must constantly speak or murmur prayers with our mouth. It does mean that that in our hearts we should always be in the spirit of prayer. It is a feeling of our dependence upon God and always be confident of His help.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:17: pray continually
- Psalm 50:15: and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.

Much of the above information is taken from: "Luther's Small Catechism" annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler.