

HOW DO I PRAY?

Help!

A JESUS-CENTERED GUIDE





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If “Pray Without Ceasing” Feels Impossible...

Of course it's impossible. At least, it's impossible if your idea of praying is to close your eyes and talk at God.

Good luck driving to work while doing *that*, although you'll certainly inspire other drivers to pray while you're in their vicinity.

When Paul writes, “Never stop praying” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), he's not encouraging a nonstop monologue aimed in God's direction. He's urging his readers to be ever-aware of God in their lives, to move through their days constantly prepared to invite God into whatever is happening.

To always remain fully conscious of their relationship with God.

Apparently God isn't to be relegated to “Sunday friend” status. Or “When I'm happy” status or “Only when I'm in trouble” status.

He's your friend always. Your constant companion. *That's* prayer without ceasing, and it's very, very possible...though it may require a shift in your thinking.

Perhaps you've got prayer all organized and in a box—it's something you do at mealtimes, when you're in church, during your daily devotions. And that's working fine for you, truth be told.

Except if prayer hasn't turned stale yet, it will soon because that's not how relationships grow.

If your best friend, the one who's always texting or emailing, was told there were specific times that checking in was permitted and that otherwise you weren't to be interrupted, how well would that conversation end?

So pull prayer out of any box you have it in—and we've got a suggestion for how to grow in your ability to do that.

Following is a list of triggers—moments you're likely to encounter throughout your day that can help you get in the habit of praying at unexpected times. The goal isn't to simply add more times you're required to pray, but to help you be aware that opportunities to pray can take you by surprise.

So feel free to try these dozen triggers, but only after you promise not to turn them into something

you *must* do. They're offered to help free you, not burden you.

So...you promise? Really? Because if you don't...
Okay, then. Here you go...

[ART: JOANI'S ASKED IF THESE CAN BE
ILLUSTRATED SOMEHOW WITH SPOT ART.]

Not sure if feasible because of page count?

- When you meet a new person, quickly ask God, “Is there something you want me to say to this person?”
- When you're stopped at a red light, glance around you at other drivers. If someone's stressed, pray for peace of mind. If someone's using a cellphone, pray for that person's safety—and yours. If *you're* on your cellphone, repent.
- When you use water, thank God for that gift in a world where so many don't have access to clean water.
- When you hit the ATM, pray for the poor of the world...and your own town.
- When you glance at a clock, thank God for the gift of today.
- When you finish eating, thank God for that gift of nourishment.
- When you see your reflection, ask God to make you a reflection of his love.

- When you open social media, ask God who you might encourage with a quick email or message.
- When you walk into work, thank God for your job and the people you can serve through your job.
- Before opening a text from a friend, ask God if there's something he has for your friend—and if you can be part of giving that gift.
- When you open an envelope, ask God to give you insight and wisdom.
- When you flip a light switch, thank God for the power of the Holy Spirit.

And here's a bonus:

- When you pet a dog (or cat), thank God for his loyalty and love.

Pause to Ponder...



If you're like most believers, you consider prayer something you do. You might do it well or poorly, frequently or infrequently, but it's that Thing You Do When You Talk to God. Sometimes you're praying, and sometimes you're not praying.

The notion that you're *always* communicating with God might strike you as a bit...creepy.

Maybe there are times you'd rather God *not* be with you because you're pretty sure he wouldn't be favorably impressed with what you're saying or doing.

So, for you, keeping prayer tightly segmented and predictable is actually something you prefer.

Unfortunately, it's not something God prefers.

He knows you, so your browser history won't surprise him. Ditto what you think when that attractive co-worker passes by. And your tax returns? Yup—he's already audited them.

So what do you have to lose by being transparent with God...and yourself?

Better yet, what do you have to gain?

Talk with God about how honest he thinks the two of you can be and still remain friends. You might discover something you haven't known before.

Experiment 1: Write It Out

You'll need a sidewalk or driveway (use yours), a rainless day (sorry, Seattle), and the ability to bend.

Write out a prayer for your neighborhood where your neighbors can see it. *That's* prayer that's outside the box.

Potentially awkward? Probably outside your comfort zone, but, depending on what you write, both encouraging and supportive.

Ask God to bless the neighborhood, to keep your neighbors safe and secure. Ask for grace to be a good neighbor.

And write it in easily understood language, with words even the neighborhood kids can understand. No medieval English. No weird, churchy words nobody understands.

Then don't wash off what you've written until it disappears on its own.

After this experiment, see what—if anything—changes regarding how your neighbors treat you. See what conversations are sparked.

After this experiment, talk with God about how this prayer did or didn't shift your views of prayer and how prayer fits into your life.

“
**The Lord
is close to all
who call on him,
yes, to all who
call on him
in truth**
”

Psalm 145:18



If You're Flat-Out Tired of Praying

Hopefully the experiments you've tried as you've made your way through this little book have fanned your enthusiasm for prayer.

We know God's always eager to meet with you. Your coming to him again and again has given him ample opportunity to speak to you, to connect with you in fresh ways.

But if nothing is still happening for you, we have a solution.

Two, actually.

The first is this: Pray with others. Not necessarily with that small group from church where you all take turns going around a circle sharing "prayers and praises," which someone writes down so he can repeat them all back to God while the rest of you shut your eyes.

That's not real stuff. That's not going to do it for you.

Instead, call someone who knows Jesus and say, "I just can't pray. Can we get together to talk about that?"

Trust us—you'll hear a "yes."

When you meet, lay it all out. Share what you've tried, what seems to be between you and God, and why prayer feels like dragging a concrete block around with you. Be as honest as you can be and settle for nothing less from the person you're with.

Then listen. Perhaps God will answer your prayers about prayer through the person sitting across the café table from you. Perhaps what you need most is to invite someone else into your relationship with God, someone he can use to coach you.

And if it's not the first person you call, call someone else.

Keep seeking God however you can, and you'll find him. He promises.

And that second thing?

If you can't seem to stay awake while praying, then pray while standing up.

Seriously? You didn't think of that?

“

**If you need wisdom,
ask our generous God, and
he will give it to you. He will
not rebuke you for asking.
But when you ask him, be sure
that your faith is in God alone.
Do not waver, for a person with
divided loyalty is as unsettled as
a wave of the sea that is blown
and tossed by the wind.
Such people should not
expect to receive anything
from the Lord**

”

James 1:5-7



Prayer Journal Pages

Here's a short stack to get you started.

You have our permission to make as many copies as you'd like for your personal use, but please don't pass them around.

If you have friends or family who you think would find this experience useful, encourage them by buying them their own copy of this book. That way they'll have the entire experience—and they can make copies themselves.

Think of how much printer ink that'll save you.

And how it'll keep you from breaking a federal copyright law and everything.

Sort of a good idea all around, isn't it?

A good
prayer life
isn't about
how you
pray.

It's about
who you're
praying
to.

Help! How Do I Pray? is a portable, practical guide that takes the guilt and intimidation out of prayer by replacing how-to recipes and formulas with a focus on *who* you're praying to: Jesus.

This guide will help you:

- Be freed from the guilt of not praying “the right way.”
- Experience greater confidence as prayer moves from dutiful and boring to natural and effortless, like talking to a friend.
- Find easy, doable ideas for fresh ways to pray.
- Explore Scripture references that seamlessly connect prayer to Bible reading.
- Use journaling opportunities to demonstrate how your prayer life has deepened.

Help! How Do I Pray? is part of the **Jesus-Centered Guide** series for people wanting to grow in their relationship with Jesus, including helpful instruction on reading the Bible, knowing God's will, and prayer. Collect and share the whole set.

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