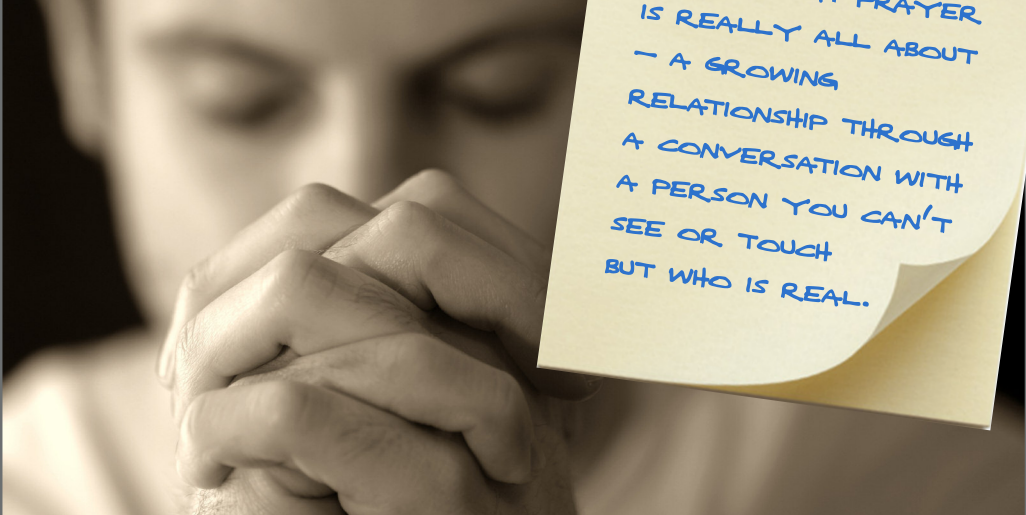


# WHAT'S PRAYER ABOUT, ANYWAY?

1

# TMP



THAT'S WHAT PRAYER  
IS REALLY ALL ABOUT  
— A GROWING  
RELATIONSHIP THROUGH  
A CONVERSATION WITH  
A PERSON YOU CAN'T  
SEE OR TOUCH  
BUT WHO IS REAL.

If you've enrolled in this short correspondence course, maybe it's because something inside you wants to connect with God. You might not know much about him, but you're open to finding out! This course is a good way of learning, because no one is going to look over your shoulder all the time, and there are no hooks attached. It will be a journey between you and God alone. You will learn about him and how to talk to him, and also about how he talks to you.

That's what prayer is really all about - a growing relationship through a conversation with a person you can't see or touch but who is real. To begin with, it's helpful to find out *who* you're actually talking to and what this God is like. This will influence what you talk to him about and how you say it.

### FOR EXAMPLE -

If your idea of God is that he is -	then you -
a non-existent God	won't pray, on principle
a disinterested God	won't bother praying
a distant God	will pray full of doubt
an angry God	will pray fearfully, if at all
a cruel God	will grovel before him while you pray
a formal God	will only pray at certain times and places, using certain proper words
a deaf God	will pray without expecting any reply
a stubborn God	will keep begging like a child
a friendly God	will pray often, like talking to a friend

In the Bible, God does not set out to prove anything. He doesn't have to – he's God! The Bible is made up largely of stories about people and how they related to God. It makes it very real. The Bible shows us how God sees things, and we can believe it or reject it. God shows that he relates to us on a trust basis – no force involved.

What the Bible says is that God stepped into our world in the person of Jesus to show us what he is like. You might struggle to accept that right now, but keep it in mind as you continue this course. If the Bible is right, then the best way to answer any questions you might have is for you to encounter God and personally experience him in prayer.

## Get involved -

*Share your idea of who or what God is, and how your understanding influences the way you would talk to him.*





Vending Machine



Empty Room

## Common but inaccurate pictures of prayer

**The “Life Raft”** ... only to be used in emergencies or when everything else fails.

**The “Insurance Policy”** ... only to be used when tragedy strikes. We pay our annual premium by going to church once or twice a year.

**The “Vending Machine”** ... only used when we want something. We put a dollar in and expect an answer to come out.

**The “Poker Machine”** ... you never win, but hope someday you’ll strike it lucky. You go through the same old motions every time but it’s just a formality.

**The “Locked Door”** ... you have to get the secret combination to open the door and get in to God so he will hear you.

**The “Service Centre”** ... you only do it at church.

**The “Empty Room”** ... you pray to God but he never answers.

## Get involved =

*What is your picture of prayer? Use just one or two words to describe prayer.*

# Prayer is a universal phenomenon

It seems that all through history humans have reached out to someone or something bigger and beyond themselves.

- Many Muslims pray five times a day toward the city of Mecca.
- Jews in Jerusalem pray at the Wailing Wall.
- Animists pray to the spirits in nature.
- Jesus often prayed out in nature.
- Some Hindus have a collection of prayer songs and mantras.
- Buddhists burn incense while they pray.
- Ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans prayed to many gods, but mainly the sun.
- Some Christians use prayer books to pray.

And many religions use prayer supports - like rosaries, candles, wheels and flags.

PLEASE NOTE  
THAT YOU DON'T  
HAVE TO BE A  
CHRISTIAN TO DO  
THIS COURSE.



Please note that you don't have to be a Christian to do this course. It is written from a Christian perspective, with the Bible as its main reference point. But most importantly, prayer is talking to a friend. Anyone can do it, whatever his or her background. It is also interesting to note that Jesus taught his followers to pray to God as a loving father.

## Guidelines for beginners in prayer

### **Prayer is spiritual before it is religious**

There is a huge difference between being religious and being spiritual. We all have a spiritual part to us, that inner something in our humanity that expresses itself through our conscience, intuition and our desire to worship. Religion is one way that we express our spirituality. Organised religion is the formal and shared way of expressing our spirituality. If it is reduced to just going through the same repeated routines, it becomes meaningless, like saying the same thing over and over again to a friend and saying nothing new or interesting.



We are all spiritual, but not everybody is religious. This course is about how you can express your own unique spirituality through prayer. The good news is there is no set formula and everyone will do it differently. Your prayers are personal - something special between you and God.

WE ARE ALL  
SPIRITUAL,  
BUT NOT  
EVERYBODY IS  
RELIGIOUS.

### Prayer has many benefits

1. God invites us to move towards him. When praying, it's not what you know but who you come to know.
2. Medical researchers are finding evidence supporting the theory that people who pray regularly experience health benefits.
3. Your confidence in God will deepen as you witness answers to your prayers.
4. Prayer will strengthen the certainty that God cares about you.
5. Prayer enables you to express your gratitude.
6. You can pray anytime, anywhere, and in any situation.
7. **You can start right now.**

## Get involved =

*To get involved in experiencing the benefits of prayer, just tell God what is in your heart and mind. Maybe you can write it down. Just use everyday language. This could be the start of your prayer -*

*God, I just want to say . . .*

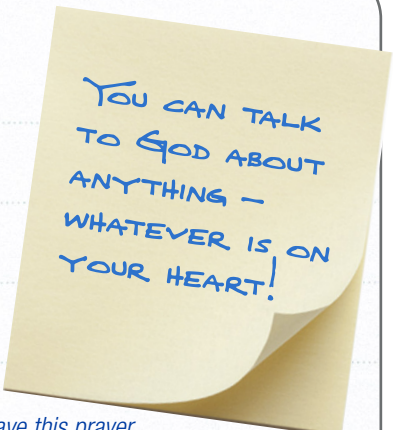
### What should I pray about?

You can talk to God about anything - whatever is on your heart! For example, it could be asking for direction about an important decision you're about to make. It could be about a health problem. You might find yourself or a friend in a dangerous situation and feel the need for safety. You may be wrestling with a huge problem and need strength to see you through. Maybe you've been struck by the beauty of something around you and just want to say *thank you* to someone. Or you just want to share your innermost feelings with someone who will unconditionally love and accept you. The truth is there is no limit to the things you can pray for at any time.

While it is helpful for some people to have set times of prayer throughout the day, this does not exclude talking to God spontaneously in an informal way at any time - at work, while driving, or even during times of leisure and pleasure.

### Why do people say Amen?

*Amen* is a word that people say during a prayer, but usually it comes at the end. In a group it means - *Yes, I agree with what has just been said*. It is like emphasising the content of the prayer. When an individual is praying he or she can say *Amen* to mean - *This is coming from my heart, God. I now leave this prayer with you*. It is mainly used, however, when a group has been praying and others agree with what has been said in the prayer. It simply means - *That's my prayer too*.



YOU CAN TALK  
TO GOD ABOUT  
ANYTHING -  
WHATEVER IS ON  
YOUR HEART!

### Prayer has a twin sister – reading the Bible

Prayer is a two-way conversation. One way is when we talk to God in prayer. The second is when God speaks to us as we read the Bible. It is not only a book about what men thought about God. He inspired men to write, and by reading it we are exposed to his thoughts. His words often speak directly to whatever you are praying about, but sometimes answers will settle in your mind as you read. If you haven't read the Bible much, why not buy yourself one? Get a modern translation because it will be easier to read than older versions. Read whatever translation speaks to you the most. It's incredible to think that God chose to reveal himself throughout this book. In this course you will be reading a few Bible verses about prayer, and it would be helpful for you to become familiar with this book – it has always been a best seller.

### Get involved =

*How has your heritage and background influenced the way you might begin to pray?*





# Jesus and Prayer

Jesus selected twelve men to learn as much as they could from him in order to carry on his work after he left. They came from every level of society, and as a result were a very mixed group. They lived with him every day for just over three years. One day they were surprised as they listened to him praying. As a result they probably asked the same question you might have asked. The Bible says -

***One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray.*** Luke 11:1



In other words, what they were really saying was - *We wish we knew God the way you do.*

It wasn't only *what* Jesus said as he prayed that made an impression on his followers. It was also *how* he prayed. For example, the Bible says -

***Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*** Mark 1:35

WHAT THEY  
WERE REALLY  
SAYING WAS -  
WE WISH WE  
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Also on another day -

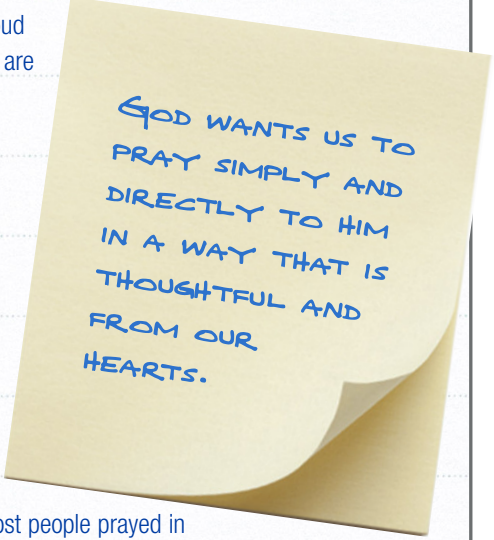
***Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. Luke 6:12***

Those who are learning to pray often ask - *How could he talk to God for so long? We're always running out of things to say!*

The Bible shows that Jesus must have prayed out loud enough for others to hear since many of his prayers are recorded. The night before he died he asked to be released from the horrors that lay before him on the following day. (See Matthew 26:36-46) That same night he poured out his heart to God for all his followers down through the ages. (See John chapter 17) He prayed for you that night too!

At first you may find it difficult to pray out loud, but you could write your prayer. This helps people organise their thoughts and stop their minds from wandering. But he's pleased however you choose to share your thoughts.

Jesus' prayers were in sharp contrast to the way most people prayed in those days. In fact, he used their manner of praying as an example of how *NOT* to pray. He described the religious leaders of the day as *showing off* because they prayed loudly on street corners and painted their faces white in the temple. As a result he said -



GOD WANTS US TO  
PRAY SIMPLY AND  
DIRECTLY TO HIM  
IN A WAY THAT IS  
THOUGHTFUL AND  
FROM OUR  
HEARTS.

***And when you pray, don't 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. 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. Matthew 6:5-6***

The religious leaders were turning prayer into a theatrical production. God wants people to pray privately and to be authentic.

Jesus also described *pagans* (a word used in Bible times to describe people who did not believe in and worship the God of the Israelites) as long-winded, using mechanical prayers to try and force their gods to grant their many desires. Jesus said -

***When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.*** Matthew 6:7

God wants us to pray simply and directly to him in a way that is thoughtful and from our hearts.


As you begin this journey of learning how to pray you will discover that some things about it are not easy. Often it seems easier to speak to others than to speak with God. People usually have less to say to God when they are alone with him than if they are praying with others. It becomes clear that prayer is evidence of a person's relationship with God.

## **Get involved =**

*Share the greatest reason that has prompted you to want to learn how to pray.*

A large dashed rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for a person to write their response to the prompt above.





So now that you've opened the door . . . keep going and don't stop! The following booklets in this series will help you to understand how God has given us a simple and meaningful model of how to pray.

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