

Ways of Meeting God

Meeting God in Prayer

Sometimes, however, we need guidance -- we need to learn to pray. Prayer grows out of a relationship with God that is permeated by grace and love and is therefore preeminently communion -- wordless, Spirit -- to -- Spirit oneness with God. But prayer is also conversation with God. So we learn to pray by using the words God has given us. In the pages of the Bible we discover not only teaching about prayer but ancient prayers that help us dialogue with God today. "Repeating God's words after [God]," wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "we began to pray to [God]."

The Lord's Prayer

One very meaningful way to "repeat God's words" in our prayer is through the prayer Jesus gave his disciples -- the Lords Prayer. A Jewish Rabbi in that time often gave his followers an outline for prayer that expressed the unique characteristics of his teaching, an exercise that brought the group together around a common identity. But behind the disciples request lies a deeper need. He wants to know how to both commune and communicate with God. Many of us still make the same request as this disciple. Jesus' response can enrich and transform our praying. In fact, many consider the "discovery" of this prayer as a turning point in their prayer life. The Lords Prayer is not just a prayer to say, but more significantly, a way to pray. More than a formula to recite, the Lords Prayer guides us through three successive movements of opening ourselves to God.

ADORATION

"Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come." Adoration celebrates our communion with God. It brings us into conscious awareness of the reality of God with us. Adoration focuses our attention on God, liberating us from focusing on ourselves and setting the context for all true prayer. In adoration we align our lives with God's purposes, we gladly let go of lesser attachments and give God's love full control of our hearts

and minds. We respond with gratitude to the God who first called us into a loving relationship.

An act of adoration may consist of slowly repeating the words, "Father, holy and honored be your name" for a period of time, letting Jesus name for God give expression to our love and praise as God's children. We may build on these trusted words with psalms of praise or familiar hymns that come to mind. Adoration may consist of quiet reading and reflection on Scripture verses and spiritual classics that bring us into God's presence.

PETITION

"Give us each day our daily bread . . . and lead us not into temptation. Petition is asking God for what we need, especially for those things we need in order to continue in our communion with him. Petition invites us to bring to God no less than the totality of our daily lives: our joys and struggles, hopes and hurts, desires and disappointments, loves and hates, pleas and resentments, and our need for healing and for change. By opening ourselves fully to God, we allow God to meet our true needs; God may also kindle in us a desire to question some of our perceived needs. By presenting to God every desire and request, we allow God to bless worthy dreams, to expose not-so-worthy dreams and to give us a passion for God's own dreams.

CONTRITION

"Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us." Contrition seeks grace to restore our communion with God. It is admitting that there are areas in which we have failed. Contrition is the inner chamber of decision and transformation where sin and grace meet, where, with Jesus, we die to sin and rise with him to new life. Contrition is also opening to God those parts of our lives that have been closed to him.

The Lord's Prayer, then, is both a prayer and a formula for prayer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says of it, "Every prayer is contained in it . . . All the prayers of Holy Scripture are summarized in the Lord's Prayer, and are contained in its immeasurable breadth."

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Praying The Bible

Perhaps no other book of the Bible has been prayed more frequently than the book of Psalms. Of the Psalter, the collection of psalms, Martin Luther once wrote, "It penetrates the Lord's Prayer and the Lord's Prayer penetrates it." No wonder some call Psalms the "prayer book of the Bible." Praying through the Ten Commandments can become a prayer of self-examination.

Being Quiet Before God.

Learning to be quiet and to rest with God is essential in prayer. Silence is the discipline of pushing aside words, busyness and noise in order to create space within for God. In what some have called "contemplative prayer," the words and forms recede altogether. Prayer becomes a simple, restful experience of basking in the Lord's presence. Rich silence – not our own making – allow us to commune with God. Our prayers may even alternate between articulated words and these quieter, less verbal times.

Whether we pray with the depth and breadth of the Lord's Prayer or recite a verse of a psalm, whether our words are many or few, whether we actively intercede or simply rest in God's presence, prayer is an intimate meeting with God.¹

¹ The Spiritual Formational Bible