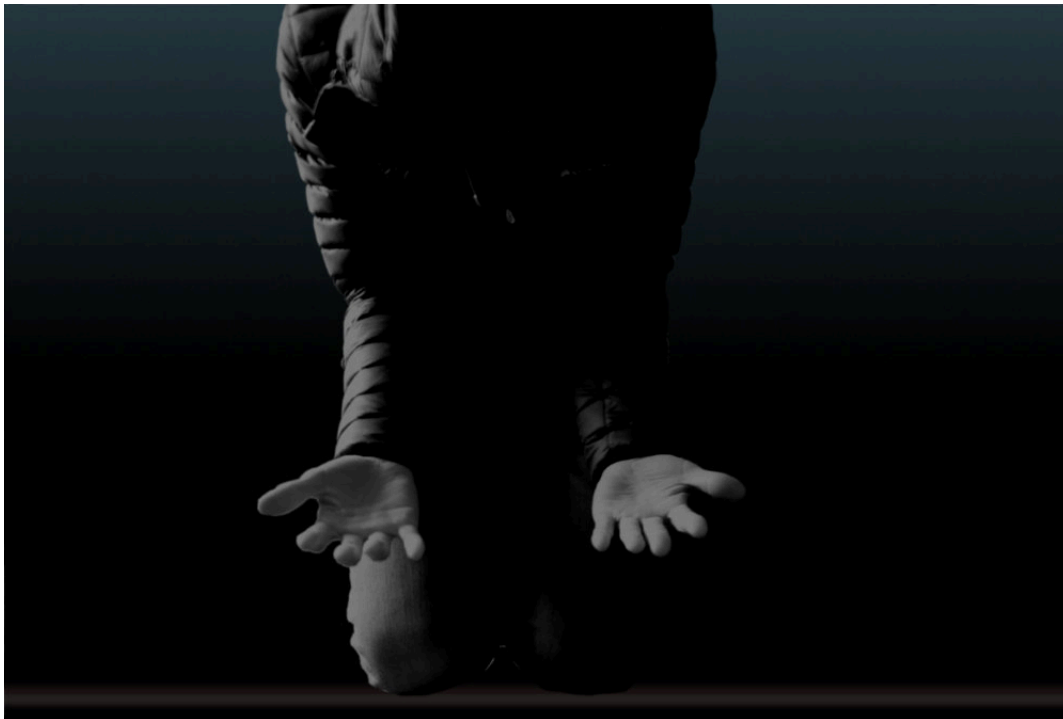


Myfishbites.com – Ministry - Basics – Prayer Questions

This basics session looks at prayer by getting us to answer some questions. When we ask questions, we often find we have the answers without needing someone to tell us. When we do this with other people, we can learn a lot!

There are a bunch of questions below with answers below each question. If you like, just ask the questions (see the PDF download) or use the answers too! This is absolutely not a complete guide. Share your ideas too!

For a great and authoritative book on prayer I'd point you to the book by Mike Bickle 'Growing In Prayer' (it's complex... makes this session look very basic!!)



PQs – Prayer Questions!

The question comes first and then some (hopefully) helpful tips if needed!

What is prayer?

Prayer is a conversation between us and God. It's a place where we can talk to God and ask him things, listen to what he may say and just spend time with God. Prayer is often a place where people pour out their feelings to God. He's big enough to handle your questions, frustration, pain and even anger. It's also good to thank God. In fact thanking God is a way of praying. It's a good thing to thank God through your day!

How do we pray?

We can pray in all kinds of ways. We don't have to be anywhere or do anything specific. We just talk to God like we would talk to a friend. Yes, God is really pure and awesome so we should respect him. But prayer isn't so much about how we pray, it's more about that we do pray!

There may be times where you want to kneel or bow down or even lie face down on the floor. All these are symbolic of us saying, 'God you're big, I'm not. Only you can help.' There may be times where you spend a long time in prayer. You may want to go somewhere specific and quiet. You may even want to go without food or something else to help you focus on God (this is called 'fasting'). You may also like to read prayers or just pray your own prayers. It doesn't matter so much how – it does matter that we pray and when we pray that we really mean it.

Why pray? Especially if God already knows what we need!

We pray because God says we can – and should! It helps us know God and know what he thinks. God invites us to work with him to see his good plans happen on earth – prayer is a part of this (so is action!) "When we pray, coincidences happen. When we don't, they don't!" Jesus regularly said how important prayer is!

God knows all things, including what we need. But he gets us to partner with him. A lot of prayer should be about praying for God's ways to happen on earth just like they do in heaven. Part of our praying is talking to God, communicating with him like a friend. We don't understand the mystery of prayer but when we pray, God does things, although he isn't dependent on us praying!

Who do we pray to? God? Jesus? The Holy Spirit? Does it matter?

The 'official answer' is that prayer is to the Father in the name of the Son and through the Holy Spirit. But... it's important to know there aren't any 'rules' about praying! God doesn't go, "ooooh, you didn't say the right words, sorry, not gonna listen to that prayer!" What matters is our hearts – God hears what we really mean even when our words get confused! We pray and God goes to work!

What makes you pray? What stops you from praying?

We often pray when there is a need, especially if we're desperate. We may also pray if someone asks us to – although unless we pray straight away we often forget! So when you say you'll pray for someone or something, pray right then! We often don't pray if we're not really close to God or maybe when we're disappointed or upset. Or sometimes when life is full-on. But actually praying helps us deal with life because when we pray, we invite God to get involved and he does things better than us!

What happens if we don't pray? Can I pray 'wrong' prayers?

The good news is that God is going to zap you if you don't pray. But if we don't pray, we miss out on speaking to and hearing from God. There's something quite incredible about praying that is really profound and connects us to God in a way that we miss out on, if we don't pray. You actually get to 'miss' this connection with God. If God uses us to work with him in prayer then it's also possible that people around will miss out on God moving in their situations if we don't pray. It's hard to get our heads around all this but it's true.

And we can't really pray 'wrong' prayers. First of all the Bible tells us in Romans 8 that the Holy Spirit takes our prayers and in a way 'translates' them to God. It doesn't mean we should pray any old thing though! If what we're praying is in the Bible, is supported by Bible principles – and isn't against the Bible then we're on pretty solid ground. In the book of 1 John we also learn that 'if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us...' It doesn't mean that God is deaf if we pray 'wrong' prayers, it means that God will filter out wrong prayers and only hear and answer right prayers. So don't worry too much about it!

The Bible talks about praying all kinds of prayers but what does it mean?

There are lots of prayers we can pray... We can ask God for something. We can thank God for something. We can worship God for who he is. We can ask God to intervene (get involved directly) in situations or lives. We can pray that God's will is done in a situation. We can ask for something directly – like a boyfriend or girlfriend. We can say sorry to God. We can ask God to change us. We can ask God to push back evil. We can pray that God does an amazing thing in a nation so people know him. You can ask God for his favour at school or work. You can ask God to help you learn your lines for a drama... Lots of ideas...

How do we decide what to pray about and not to pray about?

"Lord, should I get out of bed to the left or the right." "Lord, should I put on my left sock before my right sock..." We could spend all day praying silly prayers. But really we should pray about something if it comes into our mind. So you may start thinking about a person – that's often a good time to pray for them, even just saying 'God help them.' Or you may see a news story and want to pray about that. Or you may need a parking space – pray about that too!

What's the connection between prayer and worship / thanking God?

In Philippians 4 the Bible talks about presenting our requests to God (praying) along with thanking God. Psalm 95 talks about worshiping God and then hearing God's voice. It's like one thing helps another. When we worship we do a couple of things: we thank God and we put God in his rightful place – above us! When we do this we put ourselves in a place where we get to hear God. I strongly believe that worship is simply another kind of praying. Many times in the Bible, people wrote and spoke psalms or told God who he was. Worship is just the same!

Do we have to say sorry to God about all our sin (the wrong things we do) before praying? Does God hear us if we don't say sorry?

No, we don't have to say sorry to God. But our sin can act as a bit of barrier between us and God. God doesn't go anywhere but we can find it harder to connect to God if there's a load of 'trash' in the way. We can't say sorry for everything we do wrong because we don't even know some of what we do wrong! But if you know there's something and you can get right with God, it will help you! God does hear us if we don't say sorry (we could never become a Christian otherwise!) but God does invite us to lay down all the rubbish, get rid of it and get right with other people and him. That way we also get connected. You don't like falling out with mates and it's great when you get things sorted. Same with God but much bigger!

Why did Jesus need to pray?

Prayer is about connecting our hearts to God's heart. It's like a WiFi connection where God is putting out the WiFi signals (his Word is like a hotspot) and our hearts are the devices receiving the signal. Jesus only did and said what he heard God saying and doing. So how did Jesus hear and see this? He spent time with God in prayer.

What did Jesus mean when he told the disciples to "ask and you will receive"? Can we pray for anything and get it?

The Bible makes many amazing promises. But we can't just grab one thing and hope to have the whole picture. For example, you may say someone is a 'teacher' but they're not just a teacher – they're lots of other things too. So yes, Jesus did say ask and you will receive.

But... we can't ask God for something that God says is wrong. We also can't think that God is like a machine where we put the 'card' in and out comes some 'money'. What God says is true. But sometimes it's not the right time, it's not the best thing for us, he has something better or God has a bigger plan at work which will help lots of people. So when we ask, we have to know that God will answer in his way, in his time and if he doesn't, he has still answered us by saying 'that's not good for you, I've got something better.'

Prayer isn't just about us getting what we want. It's about other people and most importantly it's about God doing his will – sometimes God's will means we don't get everything we want because he's working on a much grander and better plan! The more we pray, the more we should want what God wants. Who wants what God doesn't want and what wouldn't be good for us? Not me!

What did Paul mean when he encouraged the believers to “pray without ceasing”? Does that mean we have to walk around all day talking to God?! Aren't people going to think we're a bit weird...?

OK so obviously we can't pray non-stop. God doesn't mean go around praying 24/7. Apart from anything, sleep is a good idea given to us by God to refresh us! What he really means is stay connected to God. Be aware of God. Think about God. Say little prayers as you go about your day – 'thank you God', 'Lord, bless that guy'. It may involve praying for someone at work or offering to pray for someone who is sick. Stay God-aware!

When do we keep on praying about something (over time) and when do we stop praying about something?

This is a really tough one. It's hard to know when to stop praying about something and when to keep on going. So here's a few tips. First, we can keep praying until we see the prayer answered. Second, we keep praying while something is 'on our heart' (so when something keeps coming back to us and we think about it). Third, we can pray until we have peace that we know God has heard us and we believe he's going to answer. In a way this is our 'faith'. Fourth, we should keep praying where a situation is on-going. For example persecution of Christians.

How important is faith in seeing answers to prayer?

There is a famous incident that happened to a man called George Mueller (look him up and his incredible God-work at orphanages in Bristol). This was someone who just believed God and saw incredible things happen. One day he was on a ship going to the USA and Canada to speak and the fog came in. The captain told him they'd never make it on time. Mueller disagreed and prayed and asked God to get him there on time in whatever way. The captain wanted to pray after him but Mueller stopped him basically saying 'I believe God has already answered and don't need your doubts and lack of faith.' They went outside, the fog had cleared and they got to North America on time.

George Mueller also said, *“The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.”* So we can see that our faith (which means our belief in God and that he will do what he says) does matter – God often asks us to let go of something and give it completely to him before he acts. In a way our faith it's like a light switch that turns on the electricity of God's power. Some people bang on about 'you must have faith' in an obsessive way. But God is more relaxed... He just asks us to believe him and agree with what he says!

There are also times where God gives us 'faith' as a gift for something. So there have been times where I have prayed for something incredibly confidently, being completely sure that it will happen. In Mark 11 in the Bible, Jesus said to his disciples 'have faith in God'. But a better translation is 'have God's faith.' So there are times where God gives us a gift of faith for something very specific. When it happens, you will just 'know' on the inside of you!

How do we know that the outcome to our prayers wouldn't have happened anyway (i.e. if we hadn't prayed)?

We don't know! But what we do know is that God tells us to pray. Jesus prayed all the time. So did Paul, the disciples, other people in the Bible and Christians throughout history. We know that prayer works. We know that when we pray, things happen and when we don't, they don't. Sometimes we need to invite Jesus to work in a situation – just like we 'invite' Jesus to be boss of our life if we want to follow Jesus.

So for example if someone comes to your house or flat, you don't normally leave them stood outside. You invite them to come in and hang out with them. Very often this is how God works. When we invite him to get involved, he gets involved! Knowing this, why wouldn't we pray?! We can also see that when we pray really specific things and then see specific answers, it is evidence that prayer works, that God hears and God answers. Which is what the Bible says.

What is the value of praying with others?

Sometimes it's good to pray with other people. You may not always do this and sometimes it's not wise. There are also some things you want to keep between you and God. But the Bible talks about something called 'agreement'. This is when people agree in a deep way. This verse is in Matthew 18.19 and talks about when two people truly agree then God will act. The original language this was written in (Greek) uses a word from where we get our word 'symphony'. So this is when instruments come together in harmony to produce one sound. When we pray like this (with a friend, partner, someone at church etc) it has a power that goes beyond us just praying alone.

What does "amen" mean? Why do we pray "in Jesus name"

'Amen' just means 'yes, I agree!' We pray in 'Jesus' name' not because it's a special magic formula but it's like we're coming to visit the Queen. We don't know a Queen (or King) personally but maybe we've got to know one of her grandsons who gives you permission to call on them and say 'your grandson gave me permission to call you'. We could then come to the Queen or King 'with the name' of the grandson and all that it means. When we pray, we come to God 'in the name of Jesus' so we're standing on the truth and the promises of Jesus and all that he is. So when we pray we know we have the authority of Jesus supporting us. And the name of Jesus is so powerful that many people through history have tried to ban it!