

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Prayer is communicating with God.
- Prayer has many forms and styles.
- We can pray alone or in a group.



How Do I Start?

Prayer begins in the heart; it is “the place of encounter...the place of covenant” (CCC 2563). You know how it feels to let someone into your heart; invite Jesus to meet you there, too. It can begin as simply as saying “hello”: *I’m here, God. I’m ready to talk and to listen.* Just showing up and agreeing to enter the conversation is an act of faith and love. Maybe you just want to sit and talk about what’s on your mind. It doesn’t matter if your prayer is deep, serious, lighthearted, long, or short. God meets you wherever you are.

“Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.”

St. John Damascene; CCC 2559

Your Prayer Life

We’ve come to know and believe that God made us, loves us, and longs to be in relationship with us. But we can’t have a relationship with someone we never talk to. Our faith has to become personal. Prayer helps make it personal.

What Is Prayer?

Prayer has a pretty broad definition. It’s really anything we do that brings us into conversation with God. It can be a conversation, a common prayer like the Our Father, or any experience that makes you feel closer to God. We can pray to God when we want to praise him, we can petition God when we need something, or we can give thanks to God for something good.

“I have called you by name: you are mine.”

Isaiah 43:1

What if God Doesn’t Respond?

God is *always* present and listening, but we’re not always aware of it—or of his response. Sometimes we focus so much on our words and needs and how we’re praying that we forget about God. *Let go of expectations.* God’s answers don’t always come in the way or on the timeline we envision. As life passes, listen for hints in conversations or in what you’re reading and watching. Maybe a sentence, image, or person will touch your heart with particular clarity. Maybe your feelings will begin to change. There might not be an immediate or obvious answer, but God *will* respond.

Can I Pray “Wrong?”

Our prayer experiences won't always be the same. Sometimes they will be deep; sometimes they will feel dull or flat. Isn't that the way it is with most things?

Don't worry about praying the “right” way. Don't get discouraged. Speak openly and honestly to God—even if that means bringing your unattractive or unpopular parts with you. God can handle our bad attitudes and mistakes.

Kinds of Prayer

“Christian Tradition has retained three major expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative.”

CCC 2699

1. *Vocal prayer* includes private conversations and group expressions of praise and petition. It can be informal, spontaneous, traditional (Our Father), or liturgical (the Mass).
2. In *meditative prayer*, we reflect on something—often the Scriptures, a spiritual writing, or life events—in order to open our heart to God's will. Common examples are *lectio divina* (page 3) and the rosary.
3. *Contemplative prayer* allows the Spirit to draw us into our own hearts. Its key components are finding a quiet place, asking God to guide and bless our contemplation, and being mindful of our breathing. As we pray, we might focus on a single word, image, or short prayer.

Within these categories, there are countless forms and styles. Try one of the prayers in this lesson, or find your own.

Pray With Nature

Go to a park, lake, garden, or zoo. Visit a nearby stream, field, or grove. Climb a mountain. Make it a journey to and with God. Remind yourself of the magnificence of his creation. Cultivate a sense of wonder, awe, and mystery.

- *Where do you get away from life's demands? Is there a place that you find especially peaceful? Consider turning this place into a special prayer space.*



Visit a Holy Place

You don't have to wait for Sunday to go to church. God is always present there. Many parishes also have chapels for **Eucharistic Adoration**—a “holy hour” of prayer and worship to Jesus in the Eucharist that takes place outside of Mass.

A **pilgrimage** is a “journey to a sacred place undertaken as an act of religious devotion” (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*). Whether the place is near or far, you are pursuing God, and the physical journey itself becomes a prayer. This tradition appears in the Old Testament. God's people have always been a pilgrim people—on a journey to the holy, to God.

Pray Using Imagery

Saint Ignatius of Loyola bases much of his teaching about spiritual life on imagery. He recommends reading a Scripture passage slowly, especially stories about Jesus, picturing scenes in your mind, and imagining yourself in them. Let the story unfold with both Jesus and you present.

Pray With Scripture

The Church encourages “frequent reading of the divine Scriptures....Prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. For ‘we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read’ the [Scriptures]” (CCC 2653).

One ancient Catholic practice is called *lectio divina*, or divine reading. Read a Scripture passage slowly and savor little bits of it. Often a word or phrase will stand out, or the scene will take on new life or meaning.

The writings of the saints can also lead our hearts deeper into prayer and closer to God. As we read the writings of holy people, we sense God's nearness. That experience can transform us.

Write Your Prayer

Journaling is another way to express our thoughts and feelings toward God. When we feel spiritually dry, it can be helpful to reread something we wrote at a more vibrant point in our faith journey. It reminds us that God is always faithful, listening, and present. Jesus seems to say, "Remember when...?"

Sing Your Prayer

Saint Augustine is attributed with saying, "He who sings prays twice." Sing familiar and favorite songs, or compose your own melody and lyrics. God doesn't care about pitch or vocal quality. If you sing from your heart, it's prayer! Playing an instrument can be prayer as well.

Pray With Your Body

Catholics kneel, fold their hands, bow, and much more. If you don't know what to say, convey a message in gesture—lift your hands, bow your head, raise your face, or dance! We communicate with others through touch and body language all the time. Sometimes, words aren't necessary.

Pray in Silence

In our busy lives, we can forget the value of simply being with God. It takes deliberate intention to seek him. At first, this prayer may last only a few seconds, but with practice, the time will lengthen. You can make—or find—these times throughout the day. Eventually, you'll discover that you can "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Pray When You're "Too Busy" to Pray

Busy lives mean we pray on the go, in the midst of daily life. Say a prayer as you get dressed in the morning, as you think about your kids during the day, or as you avoid a traffic accident on the drive home. While it's good to make regular time for prayer, it's also good to connect with God throughout your day.

Offer It Up

In the face of a challenge, dilemma, or trial, patiently enduring any suffering or accepting a minor sacrifice can become a prayerful offering of hope and faith in Christ, who redeems the world. Our suffering and sacrifice unites us to Christ as we recall his suffering and death that won our salvation.

Give Thanks in Prayer

We can make thankfulness the centerpiece of our prayer and life. Every evening, we can thank God for at least one thing we've never thought to thank God for before. The word *Eucharist* means "thanksgiving" or "grateful" in Greek; the Mass is our communal way of giving thanks to God. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude in your life.

Pray the News

Praying for others is as important as praying for ourselves. Choose a person or situation in the news, giving thanks for the good and requesting help for those in need. Besides countering any negative or false messages, this prayer connects us to the world and prompts us to appropriate action.

Pray the "Jesus Prayer"

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Some Final Tips



Practice one of the prayers listed in this lesson, then describe your experience in your journal.

- *Minimize distractions.* If you need to adjust location, position, lighting, temperature, or noise level to focus on God—and you're able to do so easily—do it.
- *Be patient yet diligent.* If your mind wanders, gently return your attention to God, your prayer word(s), Scripture passage, or the concern at hand. If you get out of the habit, just start again. While in the moment, pause for a while. Does anything else emerge? Is there something Jesus wants to say to you?
- *Keep it simple.* Don't try to say, do, or figure out too much. Whenever a prayer comes to you, let it out.
- *Don't force it.* Don't go through the motions for the sake of habit or accomplishment. If a prayer is no longer working, try something new. Just keep praying.
- *Don't answer for God.* Prayer isn't an order form for a perfect life. In responding to God's call, make yourself vulnerable to his ways.

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