

Can You Trust God?

How Should I Pray?

Philippians 4:4-9

Grace Fellowship Church / Dave Wernz / May 24, 2020

One of the simplest ways to prove and practice our trust in a good God, no matter what our circumstances, is to pray. While simple in principle, it can be frustratingly difficult in practice.

Learning *how* to pray flows from a solid understanding of *why* to pray.

Prayer: Our conscious, deliberate communication with God.

I. We consciously, deliberately communicate with God because He chose to consciously, deliberately communicate with us.

The God of the Bible is a speaking God.

Genesis 1:1-3 “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³ And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

The God of the Bible is a questioning God.

Genesis 3:8-13 “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ ¹⁰ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.’ ¹¹ He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ ¹² The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.’ ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’”

II. We have been invited to join a conversation, but we do not control it—God does!

We struggle to join in on the conversation because we only want to talk about a fraction of what God is communicating. We get so wrapped up in the here and now that when we pray, we emphasize and prioritize the physical and immediate, as if they are more real or important than the spiritual and eternal!

Prayer was never intended as a means of informing God of our agenda. It was supposed to be our means of participating in His!

If we refuse to participate in God’s conversation on His terms, we run the risk of missing out on our growth and His mission.

III. The Basic Pattern of God’s Conversations

Jonah 1:1-3 “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.’ ³ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord...”

Jonah 3:10, 4:2 "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it. ² '...O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that You are a *gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.*'"

God didn't say anything about grace, compassion, or love back in chapter one; Jonah knew this phrase because God first said it to Moses roughly 700 years before Jonah was even born. God never changes, so it was just as true when Jonah heard or read it many years later.

All throughout scripture, God's conversations with His people follow a basic pattern:

- 1. Knowledge of something God said previously**
- 2. Acknowledging the state of the world at this moment in time**
- 3. An invitation to participate in His plans for the future**

We can follow this same pattern today because we have unlimited access to the complete Word of God, the ongoing help from the Spirit of God, and the perfect Advocate through the Living Son of God!

IV. Steps to Adjust Your Prayer Life to God's Pattern

1. We must become very familiar with what God says, especially about Himself.

- a. That means reading the Bible with the intent of knowing God very well as a person, not just to gain insight for how to manage your circumstances or to try learn something new and interesting.

"I know not the way God leads me, but well do I know my Guide." - Martin Luther

2. We must become very familiar with God's long-term plans and desires.

- a. What are His likes and dislikes?
- b. What has He said He plans to do that hasn't happened yet?

You won't be able to pray well if you don't know what God says and what He's up to. And you won't know what God says or what He's up to if you are not reading your Bible.

3. What God says about Himself and His desires must become a filter for all of our thinking. We need to force our thoughts about the world and our circumstances through these two filters.

Helpful ways for Christians to grow in filtering their thoughts:

- a. We can celebrate - when you see His character, promises, and plans show up around you or in you. Give thanks and praise!
- b. We can ask Him for help - when we see a disconnect between God's character, promises, desires, or plans, and what you are experiencing in the world or your own life. Ask for God to fill in the gaps.
 - i. Be ready for God to move you in unexpected or unpredictable ways.
 - ii. Be ready for God to change you more than your circumstances.
- c. We can grieve - Oftentimes, it's not just a gap between God's revealed will and character, and what we are experiencing - it's actually direct opposition and rebellion.

- i. In ourselves
- ii. In the world around us
 - (1) We can grieve, groan, and ask God for healing.
 - (2) We can confess and ask for mercy and grace.

Cautions to keep in mind when we talk with God about the gaps in our knowledge and the brokenness we experience:

- We are never going to see the whole picture. Since we are finite, there will always be more to the story than what we can see or know.
 - God's timing is almost never the same as ours.
- d. We can try to keep up - When we see an opportunity in the future that seems to line up with what God has said about Himself and His plans, we can ask to join in.
- i. Keep in mind we might be wrong, and that's ok.
 - ii. Even if we are right, it's not a final destination.

[See John 14:8-14]

[See Phil. 4:4-9]

Visit graceky.org/pray for a list of resources and tools to help you practice and grow in prayer.