

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Called to Pray, Invited to Practice
Matthew 6:5-13
April 26, 2026

Introduction

I wonder how you came to be a person of prayer. Did you start praying at a young age, perhaps even before you can remember? Or did you find your way to becoming a person of prayer later in life?

Personally, I cannot remember a time before I knew about prayer. As a child, I recall saying a number of prayers again and again, including some that many here likely know.

Let me test this out with a meal time favorite . . .

God is great, good is good
Let us thank him _____ (for our food).
By His hands we all are fed
Give us Lord our _____ (daily bread).

Very good. Now a bed time classic . . .

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul _____ (to keep.)
If I should die before I wake
I pray the Lord my soul _____ (to take.)

Thanks to today's children's time, I imagine you can all now pray the five-finger prayer. It is a good prayer for children of all ages and a helpful reminder to pray for others before we pray for ourselves, which reminds me of a more grownup formula for prayer. It is one that also ends with praying for our own needs.

It is called ACTS, which is an easy to remember word that shares its name with the name of a New Testament book. ACTS stands for adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. Since these words have fallen out of common usage, let me explain.

Adoration. We adore, worship, and praise God for who God is.
Confession. We admit our shortcomings and sins. Thanksgiving.
We give thanks for all God has done and is doing. Supplication.

We ask God to help us and to care for those people and causes that matter most to us.

Lord's Prayer

Whether any or all of these prayers or models for prayer are a part of your story, I know that the Lord's Prayer is. We pray it together every week during worship and many of us pray it regularly on our own.

John Dominic Crossan – a well-known scholar of the historical Jesus and prolific author – begins his book on the Lord's Prayer by inviting us to ponder the role and content of this prayer:

The Lord's Prayer is Christianity's greatest prayer. It is also Christianity's strangest prayer. It is prayed by all Christians, but it never mentions Christ. It is prayed in churches, but it never mentions church. It is prayed on Sundays, but it never mentions Sunday. It is called the "Lord's Prayer," but it never mentions "Lord."¹

The Lord's Prayer is found in Scripture in two places. It is in the latter part of today's reading from Matthew² and also appears in the eleventh chapter of Luke³. I chose Matthew's version because it sounds more like the one that we say together each week. By comparison, Luke's version is significantly shorter.

Knowing that they are far from identical encourages me not to get hung up on trying to say the prayer in the right way because there is not one correct or authorized version. It's okay with me if you start with Our Father or prefer to begin with Our Mother or Our Parent. And, it's good with me if you would rather say debts or trespasses than sins.

When thinking of the version we say most often here at First Christian, I am reminded that knowing it by heart is different from being familiar with what it includes. The Lord's Prayer is a

¹ John Dominic Crossan. *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord's Prayer*. (HarperOne, 2010), p.1.

² Matthew 6:9-13.

³ Luke 11:2-4.

prayer with an introduction and a conclusion with seven petitions in between. The first three petitions focus on relationship God: hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, and your will be done. The last four petitions focus on us: give us our daily bread, forgive us our sins, lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil.

This spring we are exploring the eight habits that shaped Jesus' earthly ministry with the understanding they should shape our lives as his disciples. In this sermon on prayer, it makes sense to begin with the Lord's Prayer.

And, it also is important not to limit this message or our experiences to this one prayer or to any one way of praying. In *The Jesus' Priorities*, Christopher Maricle suggests three ways we can be people of prayer.

First, we should pray simply.⁴

It is good news that prayers need not be complicated or fancy. They should be authentic and simple.

Anne Lamott, an author known for her frankness, begins her insightful book on prayer, with these words:

I do not know much about God and prayer, but I have come to believe over the past 25 years, that there's something to be said about keeping prayer simple.⁵

For her, and for us, sometimes the best prayers are very short and very honest. She suggests three simple prayers we can pray: help, thanks, and wow.

- Help. When life is hard or a given situation seems beyond us, simply call out to God with a prayer of "help!"
- Thanks. When life is good or something happens that is wonderful, connect with God using a prayer of "thanks!"
- Wow. When you are amazed or when something takes your breath away, turn to God with a prayer of "wow!"

⁴ Christopher Maricle. *The Jesus Priorities: 8 Essential Habits* (Upper Room Books, 2007), p.55-59.

⁵ Anne Lamott. *Help. Thanks. Wow. Three Essential Prayers* (Riverhead Books, 2012), p.1.

Simple prayers of help, thanks, or wow can be a few words or a few sentences. As life happens, these words offer a simple way to talk to God or to engage in what we call prayer.

Another option for praying simply is to rely on a prayer you have memorized that has been prayed by many others over the years. There are endless examples beginning with the Lord's Prayer. You can find many options in prayer books or online.

There is no wrong to pray a simple prayer, except perhaps by making it unnecessarily complex.

Second, we should pray persistently.⁶

As you get in the habit of praying simple prayers, you'll be on your way to praying persistently.

This is more of an invitation to regularity than a prescription for an exact frequency. What persistent prayer looks like for you will be different than what it looks like for me. And what it looks like for you today may be quite different than it was in another season.

The Apostle Paul invites us to "pray without ceasing."⁷

Throughout the day call to mind God's presence and nurture your relationship. You are free to use words, but they are not required. Prayer is the name we give to our personal communication with God.

And we live in an age when instant and constant communication are the norm. Just think how many here carry a phone in their pocket or purse all day every day.

My favorite story about prayer is the Parable of the Persistent Widow.⁸ It features a widow who keeps returning to an unjust judge, refusing to stop until he grants her justice. Jesus lets us

⁶ Maricle, p.53-54.

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

⁸ Luke 18:1-8.

know why he told the parable, informing us it is to teach us that we need to pray always and not lose heart.⁹

Third, we should pray alone and with others.¹⁰

If you are praying simply and persistently then it is likely that you are praying both alone and with others.

So . . . let's practice a bit. I want us all to have the opportunity to engage in a time of personal prayer. Let's begin with a simple prayer of help, thanks or wow.

Go ahead and pick one. Now, in the next 30 seconds or less, offer a silent prayer to God that includes a help, thanks, or wow.
(pause) Amen.

Having prayed on your own, now I invite you to practice praying together. For this, let's use what may be a new-to-you version of the Lord's Prayer, which is found as an insert in your bulletin. Let us pray together saying . . .

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe.
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world.
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings.
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope
and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

⁹ Luke 18:1.

¹⁰ Maricle, p.49-51 and p.54-55.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and forever. Amen.¹¹

Conclusion

I've reminded you of prayers you already know, named different ways to pray, and lifted up prayer as a habit worth cultivating.

The invitation is simple: you don't need more instruction; you just need practice.

So . . . begin or begin again.

And together, let's become a people of prayer.

Amen.

¹¹ Lord's Prayer from New Zealand Prayer Book.