

PRAYER

beta version

“Friend” is an interesting word in the English language because it can mean so many different things. There are those friends who tend to show up at our door only when they need something from us, like money or assistance. There are other friends whose friendship mainly revolves around a certain activity or something we have in common, like studying for a class together, watching a favorite TV show, or following the same sports team.

Finally, there are friends who we have close relationships with. We turn to them when we really need help and don't know who else to call. We like to spend time with them, even if there isn't anything specific to do or talk about. We can talk to them about almost anything, from the mundane parts of our day to our deepest thoughts and feelings.

Jesus longs to have this third type of friendship with us. In John 15:15, Jesus tells His disciples, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” In this article, we are going to look at how we can live out this friendship with Jesus through prayer.

Our Friendship with God

What kind of friendship do you have with God? Do you only pray to God when you are in a bind? Do you end up talking to God only when you are in the midst of an activity, like going to Mass or Bible study? Sharing our requests with God and going to Mass and Bible study are all good things, but Jesus wants a deeper relationship with us. Just like the deeper friendships we have in life, a relationship with Jesus will need specific things if it is going to thrive. This relationship will need time and vulnerability where you can share what's really on your heart and mind.

One of the best ways to foster this type of friendship with God is through meditative prayer, also called mental prayer. St. Teresa of Avila once said, “Mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.” Prayer is all about our friendship with Jesus and, in a very real way, prayer is a great measure of our relationship with Him. If we said we were friends with someone, but we rarely talked to that person, people would probably question the depth of our friendship. The same is true of our friendship with God.

But sometimes, especially when we first begin to pray, we can feel like God is so far away. We must remember that God longs for us to talk to Him. “Jesus thirsts; His asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him” (CCC 2560).

Ultimately, prayer is about having a conversation with God, who longs for us to have a deeper relationship with Him. So how do we have this conversation with God?

Consistent

Most of the greatest things in life all come about through a routine. You go to a class or meeting on a consistent basis. You have a set workout routine. You see friends at particular times and places to help you build those friendships. The same is true for prayer. When you are getting started, don't worry about how long you pray, so much as simply praying every single day. Even if you can only pray for five minutes, find a way to do it every day so that you build up the habit. This habit is what is going to allow your relationship with God to thrive and flourish, just like so many other routines you have.

Quiet

What's the best way to have a conversation with God? Well, what's the best way to have a conversation with a friend? When we talk to friends, it is typically important for us to have their full attention. This is true in prayer as well. Go ahead and put down your phone and be in a place without distractions. Just like with friends, recognize that you are in their presence and make sure they know that they have your full attention.

Even though we can shut down external distractions, we can still have many internal distractions, as all sorts of things can occupy our thoughts and emotions. As you pray more and more, this will get easier. Don't get too worried about these distractions; you can even use them in prayer as issues to talk to the Lord about.

Simple

When it comes to prayer, many people ask, what am I supposed to do? While there are many different approaches and techniques, when you are first starting out you want to keep it simple. After you quiet yourself down and recognize God's presence, take some time to read, perhaps ten verses or so from Scripture. Then, have a simple conversation with God about what is going on in the passage and how it relates to your life.

What else can you talk to God about? You can tell Him you love Him. You can thank Him for the many blessings in your life. You can say that you're sorry for the things you've done and the things you've failed to do. You can let Him know your needs and the needs of others. You can take what you've learned in prayer and make a resolution for how you want to live (CCC 2629-49).

Getting Started

One of the best ways to begin is by praying with someone who already prays each day. It will add instant accountability for sticking to your commitment; for the first few times, this person can even share how they pray so that you can continue to learn.

Also, at the end of this article, we've attached FOCUS' Prayer Dare. This list of verses from the Gospel of Luke will give you material to pray with over the next 30 days. Typically, habits can be formed by doing something consistently for one month; by completing the Prayer Dare, you will have a much better chance of making prayer, and a deeper friendship with God, a foundational part of your life. Make a plan and get started.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about our relationship with God being compared to our friendships? If this is true, how does it affect the amount of time and conversation that we have with God?
2. How have you prayed in the past? What was helpful as you tried to have a conversation with God?
3. On the next page is a Prayer Dare. Would you be willing to try to pray each day for 30 days? If so, what's your plan for pulling this off? What time and location will you choose? What materials will you pray with?
4. What additional instruction, accountability, or modeling do you need when it comes to prayer?

Leader's Guide: Transferrable Concepts

- Prayer is a relationship with God: St. Teresa of Avila once said, "Mental prayer . . . is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends."
- God longs to speak to us: "Jesus thirsts; His asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him" (CCC 2560).
- Getting started: When you first start the habit of prayer, focus on being consistent, being quiet, and keeping it simple.

Additional Recommended Reading on Prayer

Time for God by Fr. Jacques Philippe (General book on prayer)

WRAP Yourself in Scripture by Karen L. Dwyer (WRAP)

Meditation and Contemplation by Timothy M. Gallagher, O.M.V. (Ignatian meditation)

Prayer Dare

Here's an easy list of Scripture passages to pray with each day that will take you through most of the Gospel of Luke.

Part 1—Jesus' Early Life

Luke 1:26-35

Luke 1:36-45

Luke 1:46-56

Luke 2:1-20

Luke 3:15-23

Luke 4:1-15

Luke 5:1-11

Part 2—Jesus' Ministry

Luke 6:12-26

Luke 6:27-38

Luke 6:43-49

Luke 7:36-50

Luke 8:4-15

Luke 8:22-25

Luke 9:18-27

Part 3—Jesus on the Road to Jerusalem

Luke 9:51-62

Luke 10:38-42

Luke 11:1-13

Luke 11:37-44

Luke 12:22-31

Luke 15:1-2; 11-26

Luke 18:1-8

Part 4—Jesus' Death and Resurrection

Luke 22:14-23

Luke 22:39-46

Luke 22:54-62

Luke 23:13-25

Luke 23:32-43

Luke 23:44-56

Luke 24:1-12

Part 5—Resurrection

Luke 24:13-35

Luke 24:36-53