



## HOW TO PRAY

It's possible that most of us learned to pray the wrong way. When we were little, lots of us learned that praying was a lot like memorizing a nursery rhyme or rattling off a cute little poem. Some of us grew up only praying before dinner and at bedtime, and they were the same little prayers each time. They may have been something like this:

*“Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep...”* or *“God is great, God is good, thank you, God, for all this food.”* Or the condensed version: *“God is neat, let’s eat.”*

The problem with prayers like these is that they tend to make prayer a meaningless little ritual...something we do out of habit even though it doesn't mean much to us. Prayer is our chance to communicate with God, our heavenly Father! He would love it if we got to know him better—and one of the best ways to do that is through prayer. But we can't really get to know him better and grow in our relationships with him if we always pray the same way and at the same time every day.

Think about your best friend. How weird would your friendship be if the only time you talked to him or her was at bedtime? You give her a call and say, *“Now I lay me down to sleep, you’re a friend I think I’ll keep,”* and then hang up the phone. You don't talk again until the next night: *“Now I lay me down to sleep...”* Not only would your friend think you were crazy, but she'd probably wonder how much her friendship really meant to you.

Prayer is your chance to talk to God, to share your life with him. It's your chance to connect with the Creator of the universe. God sees himself as your Friend, and he really wants your friendship to get better and better.

What's the right way to pray? It's simple. Just pray in a way that helps your friendship with God continue to grow—talk to him naturally, knowing he's right there by your side. The only wrong way to pray is if it's a meaningless, childish ritual.



## OTHER WAYS TO PRAY

Just regular ol' talking to God is great. The only problem is that it *can* become pretty selfish sometimes—just about our big list of stuff we want to get from God. This is pretty normal, though; don't beat yourself up if your prayers are that way.

But at some point in your faith walk, you'll want to learn some *other* ways to pray. Here are a few you could try.

Keep a prayer journal. It can be really helpful to write your prayers. It's less like a conversation, sure, but it helps you to be more thoughtful. I (Marko) like to type prayers out on my laptop computer sometimes—just seeing the words on my screen really helps me focus on God and what I'm trying to say to him.

Pray with colors. Get some blank paper and some colored pencils or crayons or whatever. Spend a few minutes in silence, getting yourself quiet and thinking about God. Then express yourself to God through drawing. What you draw doesn't have to be an actual picture. It could be a symbol for something, or it could just be colors and textures that mean something to you (and that God will completely understand—remember, God knows everything).

Sit in silence. This one's tough. But if you learn how to do it, it can become one of your favorite ways to pray! See, usually our prayers are all about *us talking*. But God wants to talk to us, too, right? So how 'bout we give him a chance and just listen? If you do this, it's really important to find a quiet

place without distractions. Get comfortable, sitting, and close your eyes. Focus on your breathing for a few minutes to get your attention, and ask God to speak to you. You might have a specific subject you want God to speak to you about, or you might leave it open. Then be quiet and wait. You may have a thought or a sense or an idea that you can tell came from God.

Pray “The Jesus Prayer.” This is a simple prayer you can pray when you have no idea what else to pray. Jesus-followers have prayed this prayer for hundreds and hundreds of years! It’s simply this: *Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* The idea is to get quiet and calm and close your eyes (though this can be a cool prayer to do while you’re walking, also, and you don’t want your eyes closed then!). Make sure you’re breathing normally and slowly. Then say (in your mind, not out loud) the first half of the prayer while taking a breath in, and the second half of the prayer while breathing out. It’s the idea of breathing in Jesus, and breathing out our sin.