

Orthodoxy: Prayer

New City Catechism Question 38: What is prayer?

Answer: Prayer is pouring out our hearts to God in praise, petition, confession of sin, and thanksgiving.

“Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us” (Psalm 62:8).



When Jesus walked the earth, he spent hours in prayer each day. How do we know this? Several of the gospel authors record that Jesus often rose “very early in the morning” to be alone in a quiet place and pray (Mk. 1:35; Lk. 5:16). If Jesus, the sovereign God of the universe who took on flesh and dwelt among us, made prayer a priority, then we need to understand the doctrine of prayer so that we can follow in Jesus’ steps (1 Pet. 2:21).

Prayer is the pouring out of our hearts. Today, when people reference the concept of the heart, they usually mean one of two things: 1) the blood-pumping organ or 2) the seat of our emotions. In Psalm 62, David understood the heart in a way that is foreign to us. During biblical times, the heart was considered not only the seat of the emotions, but also the intellect and the will. The heart made choices with both emotion and intellect, and the will followed through with them.

To pour out our hearts to God in prayer means that prayer encompasses our whole being. Our prayers should be rational—thought out—as well as heartfelt. We do not mumble nonsense when we pray; we use our words to form ideas. Those ideas evoke emotion which we also humbly pour out before God. Prayer encompasses all of the heart’s faculties: emotion, intellect, and will.

Historically, God’s people have prayed prayers that fit into four categories: praise, petition, confession of sin, and thanksgiving. Prayers of praise, also called adoration, involve meditating on the character of God. God’s character is revealed by his word, so prayer is inseparable from the Scriptures. Meditate on a verse that reveals an attribute of God and praise God that he is what he is. For example, the bible tells us that “God is love” (1 John 4:16). Praise God for the love that he displayed through the sacrifice of his only begotten Son on the cross for the sins of his people. Praise God for the love that he displays through his church. Find a truth about the character of God and simply praise him for who he is.

A prayer of petition, also called prayers of intercession or intercessory prayer, involve asking God to do something. When people sign a petition, they are trying to bring about change. This is exactly the purpose of a prayer of petition. There are dangerous pitfalls with prayers of petition: asking for something that goes against God’s will or asking without humility. When we make requests of God, we must ask for things that bring glory to him. We humbly petition for our daily bread, wisdom, deliverance from evil, and self-control among many other good things (Matt. 6:11-13; Jas. 1:5; Gal. 5:23). However, God is sovereign and will accomplish all that his holy will determines. We must petition humbly, asking if it is the Lord’s will to grant our request (Jas. 4:15). The purpose of prayer is to conform our will to God’s will, not to change his will.

Scripture calls us to confess our sins through prayer (Matt. 6:12). We should pray prayers of confession of sin every day, because they reorient us to see what pleases God and what breaks his commands. When we confess our sins through prayer, we can be confident that he has forgiven us (1 John 1:9). Praying our sins is a fundamental spiritual practice. I like to pray through the Ten Commandments to see where I am breaking God’s law and ask for forgiveness.

Lastly, we pray prayers of thanksgiving. God has given us, his covenant children, every blessing in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). We have so much to be thankful for, and prayer is the way to pour out our gratitude before God. Thank God for his gift of salvation. Thank him for family, friends, and our church family. Thank him for every success that you have, because we only have good things because of his grace. Our thankful prayers are not attempting to repay a debt—we can never repay God's goodness to us. Rather, our prayers of thanksgiving are the overflow of our soul when we properly understand the gospel.

May God lead our church into a deeper life of prayer!

Praying Together as a Church

It is easy to allow our devotional lives to slip during the summer season. Especially during this pandemic, our homes have been bustling, and a few minutes with God seems like a chore. Our church has an easy-to-use resource to make your time with God simple and effective.

At the beginning of 2020, Christ Covenant launched our [Formation Devotional](#). If you are looking to form a more intentional prayer life,



Formation Devotional

there is nowhere better to start than by praying with your church. The Formational Devotional guides our congregation through prayer and Scripture reading in both the morning and the evening. It provides written prayers for you to pray and topics that we are praying together as a church.

You can pray through the Formation Devotional in as few as fifteen minutes, and over time you will begin to see the fruit of your efforts in your relationship with God. Here is a brief outline of the devotional:

Call to Prayer: A bible verse inviting you to pour out your heart to God.

Opening Prayer: This is a prayer from the Book of Common Prayer. Praying the words of saints that came before us creates depth and precision in our prayer life.

Confession of Sin: One of the most important practices in our spiritual life is confessing our sins. We want to conform our lives to God's will, and we do that by acknowledging where we have strayed. God is faithful to forgive when we confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

Praying the Psalms: Prayer is thinking God's thoughts after him. When we pray, we pray truth, and there is no better way to pray truth than praying God's word. As we read a psalm, we analyze the content and form it into a prayer that we pray back to God. The Psalms are rich with beautiful prayers to God that cover topics from fear and anger to thanksgiving and joy.

Old Testament or New Testament Reading: Each devotional has a lesson from Scripture. The devotional will cover the New Testament once each year and the Old Testament every three years. Getting consistent doses of God's word will cause us to mature in the faith.

Prayers of Intercession or Thanksgiving: The Formation Devotional provides several topics for prayer. Knowing that our church is praying the same prayers alongside you connects our private devotional lives. Having a guide for prayer makes the time more intentional, lowering the chances that you will get distracted (like I often do when I pray). This section also includes either the Lord's Prayer or another prayer from the Book of Common Prayer.

Benediction: The devotional ends with a blessing God pronounces over his people in Scripture.

If you are looking to form an intentional prayer life, try out the [Formation Devotional](#). Forming the habits of prayer and Scripture reading in the mornings and evenings will mature your faith over time. Join our church in a life of prayer and devotion to God!