

Each week of 2019 we will take a brief look at one or more questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. To read previous weeks' briefs go to [oakhillpca.com/wsc](http://oakhillpca.com/wsc)

Q. 98. *What is prayer?*

A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.

Q. 99. *What rule has God given for our direction in prayer?*

A. The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer is the final means of grace which the Catechism addresses. We are to make diligent use of the Word, the Sacraments, and prayer, which God has "made effectual for salvation" (Q. 88). There are five parts to this definition of prayer which we need to unpack.

**1. Prayer is the offering up our desires unto God.** God wants us to share with him our needs, hopes, fears, desires, and questions. He invites us to talk with him. And he promises to listen and answer. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7).

**2. We ought to pray for things agreeable to his will.** Jesus promises, "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do" (John 14:13). This does not mean that if we ask for a Lamborghini that he will give it to us. Jesus sets the example for how we should ask when he prays, "Not my will, but yours, be done" (Lk. 22:42). In our prayers, we submit our desires to God's designs.

**3. The effectiveness of our prayer lies in Christ.** Why do we close our prayers "in Jesus' name"? For, without Jesus, we could never approach a holy, perfect God, let alone make our requests known. Our prayers are accepted by God because Jesus is our mediator, who has removed the offense of our sin and made us blameless in his sight.

**4. Confession of sins ought to be a regular part of prayer.** John says that we lie and become liars if we do not confess our sins on a regular basis (1 Jn. 1:8-10). Therefore, confession ought to be a regular part of our prayers. David says that our humility in this regard is pleasing to the Lord (Ps. 51:16-17).

**5. Thanksgiving ought to be a regular part of prayer.** Paul asks, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). And James says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (Jms. 1:17). The lack of gratitude is presumptuous and arrogant before a God who has given us everything we enjoy. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jms. 4:6). Thanksgiving is a vital part of the humble posture before God.