

Guide to prayer

An overview of what prayer is, a healthy prayer life, praying in public and example prayers.

What is prayer?

Conscious communication with God

Prayer is real communication with a real God who gives real answers. It comes in many forms. Prayer can happen in short moments during our day, for hours on end and everything in between.

The example Jesus gave on how to pray

<u>What Jesus says¹</u>	<u>Summary of what he means</u>
'When you pray, do not be like those who only pretend to be holy. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners. They want to be seen by other people. What I'm about to tell you is true. They have received their complete reward.	We don't pray to look good.
When you pray, go into your room. Close the door and pray to your Father, who can't be seen. Your Father will reward you, because he sees what you do secretly.	It's good to pray alone (and together, see further below)
When you pray, do not keep talking on and on. That is what ungodly people do. They think they will be heard because they talk a lot. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need even before you ask him.	It's not about how many words, or how well-spoken you are when you pray.
This is how you should pray.	God already knows what you're going to pray,
'Our Father in heaven, may your name be honoured. May your kingdom come. May what you want to happen be done on earth as it is done in heaven.	Recognise God for who he is and his eternal plans for his kingdom. It's good to pray together (<i>Our father...Give us our...</i>)
Give us our food for today. Forgive us for doing wrong, as we forgive others. Keep us from being tempted and protect us from evil.	Ask for things we need, a day at a time. Ask for forgiveness for when we've done the wrong thing. Ask for spiritual protection and strength to resist temptation to do the wrong thing.
If you forgive others for the wrongs they do to you, your Father in heaven will forgive you. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.	Forgive others (as we who trust in Jesus have been forgiven by God)

¹ [Matthew 6:5-10](#) (NIRV), [Matthew 6:11-15](#) (CEV)

How's your prayer life?

It's common to feel insecure about your prayer life. When we pray, we're not always sure we're doing it right. Should I be asking God for this? Should I *still* ask God for this? What do I really need?

In the end, God wants a relationship with us, which means he wants to hear from us – no matter what we're feeling or how clearly we pray. All we need to do is pray and leave the rest to God.

Seven ways to grow in your prayer life²

1. Pick a time and place

You can pray anytime, anywhere, but this freedom often leads to praying nowhere. We can pray spontaneously, but it's helpful to pick a consistent time and place when we can be alone. Maybe in the morning at home, during your commute, over your lunch break, or in the evening.

2. Listen before you speak

Prayer truly is a conversation. God *really* speaks to us in his word, he *really* listens when we pray.

Through his Spirit, God may bring something to our mind, or say something through a friend. But the only failsafe way we hear his voice is in the Bible: "All *Scripture* is God-breathed".³

So, it can be a good idea to read something from the Bible (even just a verse) before you pray. If you learn something new about God, tell him. If it raises questions, ask him. Then pray for today's issues.

3. Prioritise the spiritual

Naturally, we sometimes default to praying for physical or circumstantial needs. These needs are important and worthy of prayer, but they pale in comparison to our spiritual and eternal needs. So, spend time praying for our spiritual health and the salvation of others as well as everything else.

4. Don't be afraid to stop and pray now

It's healthy to prioritise and schedule prayer, but we can pray anywhere. Bring prayer into the cracks of your day. When you feel the impulse to pray, seize it.

5. Prioritise who you'll pray for

When it comes to praying for the needs around you, realistically you'll have to prioritise some people over others. Otherwise, you will do nothing but pray! If prayer is the most important thing we can do for someone, it can be helpful to structure more of our prayer on those closest to us.

One way is to begin with ourselves, then for our family, friends, church, community, Australia and the world. But this shouldn't stop us praying for the random stranger we met yesterday.

6. Ask literally anything

Sometimes we assume God's not interested in the small details of our day. And sometimes we can't even imagine him ending wars. But don't be afraid to pray big prayers, and small ones.

² Modified from <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/prayer-for-beginners>, accessed 24 May 2023

³ [2 Timothy 3:16](#)

Have the courage to ask God to end homelessness in Australia, to close the gap, to end the scourge of ice, and that Mission Australia would be effective in meeting people's needs holistically (including spiritually).

7. Be willing to ask one more time

Jesus knows we will lose heart in prayer, but doesn't want us to.⁴ He wants us to keep asking, keep pleading, keep praying. God loves you. Knows what's best for you. And is listening. So don't be afraid to ask, again.

Four principles (not rules) for public prayer⁵

1. Things to include:
 - Showing our adoration/admiration/love for God
 - Admitting things we have knowingly or unknowingly stuffed up
 - Asking God for help with needs/concerns
2. Prayer should (mostly) include God the Father (often at the beginning), Jesus the Son (often at the end) and the Holy Spirit (often in between)
3. It's best to be thoughtful and prepare ahead of time, especially for larger audiences
4. Be centred on the good news of Jesus. For us at Mission Australia, this means:
 - Not just focusing on meeting human need (although that is always good to pray for)
 - Also focusing on spreading the knowledge of God's love (that more people might choose to know about Jesus and put their trust in him).

Example prayers

Generic prayer to open a meeting

Heavenly Father,

As we meet today, we thank you for the opportunity you give us to serve at Mission Australia.

Please give us concentration and creativity during today's session. Help us understand our personal contribution and collective impact as we work to meet human need and spread the knowledge of your love.

Through your Spirit, give us the strength, motivation and collaboration necessary to achieve your plans for us in the season ahead.

In Jesus' name,

Amen

⁴ [Luke 18:1-8](#)

⁵ Adapted from <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/four-principles-public-prayer>, accessed 24 May 2023

Prayer to end homelessness

Loving God,

You tell us that you're close to the broken-hearted and save those who are crushed in spirit.⁶ We see so much hurt in our communities through people either experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness.

We humbly ask you to intervene in this situation, here in {location} and across the country. Please bring about the collective will that is needed in society to build more social and affordable housing, so that all people can have the safety and security of a home.

Help us play our part in your mission as we care for people caught up in this awful situation. May we reflect your love for them authentically and powerfully, as we support them away from homelessness. May they know your love and through your Spirit respond to you in faith.

Finally, Lord, we ask that you would end homelessness altogether!

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Prayer for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reconciliation

Dear God,

Your desire is for us to be reconciled to each other and to you through Jesus.⁷ Individually and as an organisation help us continue to strive for reconciliation with First Nations people through recognition, empowerment and service.

Sorry for the times when we have not actively fostered reconciliation, whether it be deliberate or in ignorance. Equip us, challenge us and change us to approach reconciliation in a way that is culturally sensitive and respectful of all people, remembering that we are all created in your image.⁸

We pray that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would be restored to a place of equity, dignity and respect. A place where their cultures are fully valued, broken relationships restored and social inequalities eradicated. And we pray most of all, that you would be seen for who you are, a loving God who shows no favouritism,⁹ cares deeply for all people and desires nothing more than for people to have a relationship and be reconciled to you.¹⁰

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

⁶ [Psalm 34:18](#)

⁷ [1 Corinthians 1:10](#); [Philippians 1:27](#), [1 Peter 3:8-9](#)

⁸ [Genesis 1:27](#)

⁹ [Romans 2:11](#)

¹⁰ [2 Corinthians 5:18-21](#); [Ephesians 2:13-22](#); [Colossians 1:19-23](#)

Prayer as leaders

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for the honour and privilege of being leaders at MA.

Help us to consistently be led by our founding purpose, be driven by our values and remain focused on our vision in all aspects of our work. Guide our plans we pray.

Help us lead with wisdom that comes from you – wisdom that you tell us is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.¹¹

And help us lead like Jesus, serving and empowering our teams to lead and serve well in their roles.¹²

Amen

Prayer in times of trauma and loss

Lord God, we come to you with heavy hearts, struggling to make sense of our grief.

Thank you that the Bible describes you as *'the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles'*.¹³ May we know your compassionate comfort right now.

Thank you that you have promised to be with us when we travel through the darkest valleys of life.¹⁴ May we know your presence in a deeply personal and powerful way.

Please grant us your peace for our pain, your strength for our weakness, your healing for our brokenness. Help us to find hope and courage for the journey ahead.

We open our hearts to you now.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Other Mission Australia prayer ideas

- [Prayers for difficult times](#)
- [Prayers for new beginnings](#)
- [Prayers for healthy relationships](#)
- [Prayers for self-esteem](#)
- [Prayers for Easter](#)
- [Bible verses to reflect on at Christmas](#)

¹¹ [James 3:17-18](#)

¹² [Mark 10:42-45](#)

¹³ [2 Corinthians 1:3-4](#)

¹⁴ [Psalm 23](#)