

Love motivates Christian prayer, and it is the very core of communication with God. Four steps tested by hundreds of years of Christian experience in prayer provide is with a sure pattern whenever we take time out to pray . These steps are reading, meditation upon what is read, prayer, and communion with God, or contemplation.

Prayer, according to this proven pattern, is the upward, open-handed reach of the loving heart toward God. When Jesus was asked, “teach us to pray,” by His disciples, He prayed with them. By His Holy Spirit, Jesus still teaches us to pray in the same way.

PREPARATION FOR PRAYER

Select a quiet place. Silence is a necessary partner to prayer. Choose a translation of the Bible that is familiar to you, preferably your own. The Revised Standard Version comes highly recommended.

Decide what you will read ahead of time. Thumbing through the Bible is a waster of precious moments that should be better spent in communication with God. Five to ten minutes of reading may be plenty. That figures to be a chapter or two in the Gospels or three average Psalms. A List of suggested texts is offered at the end of this guide for prayer.

Allot your time, but be flexible. A schedule can help you if you become legalistic about it.

The **4** Steps:

Visualize the four steps as the rungs of a ladder. By moving up to each one in sequence, you move closer to the personal communion with God you seek.

The First Rung:

Reading

Reading the Bible for prayer is a unique experience, more like reading a love letter than reading a textbook or the newspaper. Free your mind of the need to learn or acquire information when you read for prayer purposes. As you read with open mind and heart, you will ne drawn to certain portions of the Scripture, perhaps no more than a verse or phrase. Resist the urge to “plow through” the rest of your reading. Follow the natural inclination of your heart, and live with that portion of Scripture for a time.

Example: You have chosen to read Psalm 23 for prayer purposes. As you begin, you are attracted to the opening lines “The Lord is my shepherd...” Though you have just begun, you have reached a fine place to move up a step higher in prayer.

The Second Rung:

Meditation

Love has drawn you to deeper consideration of a phrase of Scripture. Meditation is the consideration of the heart; it is to the reading of Scripture what the taste buds are to eating. Meditation allows us to savor the Scripture to which we have been drawn, “Taster and see that the Lord is good,” advises the Psalmist, and meditation is the means by which the flavor of God’s Word is derived. There is no need to analyze or pick apart what is read. Rather than breaking verses down into understandable pieces for teaching or preaching, meditation makes us a part of the Word and the Word a part of us.

Meditation is not daydreaming. It is the active, loving response of the heart as special meaning is

discovered in the Word. The words of the Bible begin to point beyond themselves to Christ as the living Word of God. A period of such meditation may last from three to five minutes or longer, but don’t mind the watch. Follow your heart.

Example: You consider Christ as the Good Shepherd: loving, caring, sharing. He receives children , the sick, the confused, the guilty, his adversaries, all alike. His sheep know Him and respond to the sound of His voice. You see Him in the eye of memory laying down His life for the sheep. The sweetness of your meditation increases as you realize that such a Lord is indeed your Shepherd! A longing arises within you to be nearer a savior like this, who has already drawn so near to you. You are ready to move higher.

The Third Rung:

Prayer

Beautiful words do not make a prayer. The loving aspiration of the one who prays makes prayer come alive. Prayer that rises from a true desire to draw near to God is not so concerned with asking for this or that. It is rather the upward reach of a longing heart, one full of praise and thanks. This kind of prayer is not so concerned with what we may get as what we may give. In the words of the hymn writer: “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all!”

This kind of prayer is also quite realistic. We know that what we desire is a deeper sense of the presence of the God we love. We recognize that such a thing is not possible without the direct action of God. So, we ask God to take over, and lead us gently into a deeper awareness, a more loving union with the Divine. Such prayer is true abandonment of human ability. The one who prays

In this way is utterly at the mercy of God. But our reading and meditation have led us near enough to make the leap of love that only true desire can make.

Example: "Lord Jesus Christ, my love reaches up for a deep taste of the goodness of God. I need you Lord, like a lamb needs a shepherd. Open my heart and mind. Take control of all that I am and Have, or ever expect to be. Lead me, Good Shepherd, into the presence of the God who is my life..."

The Fourth Rung:

COMMUNION AND CONTEMPLATION

Here our prayer becomes simple and uncomplicated. Words, if they are used at all, are few. Communing with God says no more than a child at ease on her mother's lap, and it says no less. It is an open wonderful repose in the simple embrace of love. Intuitively, we sense the presence of the God we desire, but rather than rush in and claim some "experience," we allow the inner doors of our hearts to swing open at the gentle touch of the Good Shepherd. We leave busy Martha behind, and content ourselves to be her sister Mary, sitting at the feet of the Presence, receiving whatever God has to give.

At best, these moments of true direct communion are brief. The brevity should not concern us. Such an exquisite, simple touch of Divine Love is timeless in its very character.

Our role is this highest ring in the ladder of prayer is simply to allow the Holy Spirit to act in the secret depths of our own hearts, and souls. If the prayer becomes weak or confused, we can return to one of the earlier rungs in the ladder, and renew our upward reach of the heart. A fitting conclusion to such

a period of prayer is a sincere, brief thanksgiving to the God of our hearts.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE PASSAGES:

The Beatitudes.....Matthew 5:3-12
The Great Commandment..... Matthew 22:36-40
Mark 12:28-34
The Lord's Prayer.....Matthew 6:9-13
Luke 1 1:2-4
On the New Birth.....John 3:1-21
On Justification by Faith.....Romans 3:19-28
Galatians 2:16-21
Ephesians 2:1-10
On Christian Love.....1 Corinthians 13
On Christian Hope.....Romans 8:28, 38-39
On Atonement.....Romans 5
On the Moral Life.....Romans 7:15-8:4
The Nature and Significance
Of Resurrection..... 1 Corinthians 15

Dr. Stephen V Sprinkle is Director of Field Education and Supervised Ministry at Brite Divinity School. Texas Christian University

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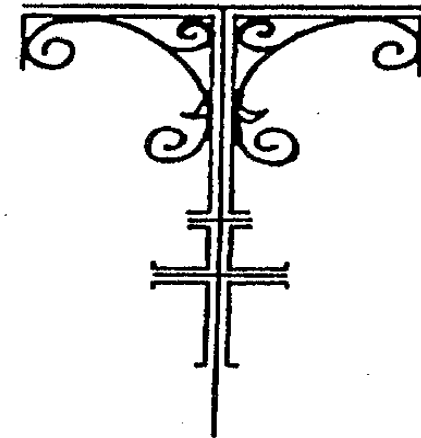


P.O. Box 1986
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-1986
Phone: (888) 346-2631 Fax: (317) 635-4426
tmcandrews@dhm.disciples.org

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A Pattern for Christian Prayer



by Stephen V. Sprinkle