

How to Pray

Bible Study • Leader's Guide

Please provide a copy of this study and a Bible for each participant, and have a copy of Luther's Small Catechism available.

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, we have come together to study Your Word, and we ask You to be our guide throughout this time together. We pray You will open our eyes, our hearts, and our minds, that we would learn from You. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I. How to Pray

Prayer is necessary in the life of a Christian. In this study, God's Word encourages us; indeed, **commands** us to pray, and shows that prayer results in blessings. To begin, focus on **how** we pray. As you are willing, share in the group or with a partner some of your own prayer habits, routines, or ways you pray, either regularly or occasionally.

Next, look at the prayer model in Matthew 6:6–13. After reading this together, share your thoughts on this as a model of prayer for you.

Look at the actual prayer, verse by verse, to discover God's instruction about praying. After all, our Lord said, "*Pray then like this*" (Matthew 6:9). As we discuss each verse, consider what it means, so we don't just speak the words.

Matthew 6:9b: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

(Jesus invites us to address God as our holy, but very personal, Father. He is to be revered, but we can approach Him confidently.)

Martin Luther wrote in his Introduction to the Lord's Prayer: "With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father." [Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism App* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).]

Luther's explanation of the First Petition: "God's name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it." [Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism App* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).]

Matthew 6:10: *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

(Here we acknowledge that we desire to see God's ultimate rule over everything and submit to His will, even agreeing to do our part to accomplish His will here on earth.)

Luther's explanation of the Second Petition: "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity." [Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism App* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).]

Luther's explanation of the Third Petition: "The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also. God's will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. [Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism App* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).]

Matthew 6:11: *Give us this day our daily bread,*

(We recognize that we depend on our Father to provide for all our needs and that we honor Him by asking Him for it every day.)

Luther's explanation of the Fourth Petition: "God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like." [Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism App* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).]

Matthew 6:12: *and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

(We are willing to admit our sins and that we owe our neighbors the same grace we have received.)

Luther's explanation of the Fifth Petition: "We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us." [Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism App* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).]

Matthew 6:13: *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

(We are asking for God's help in staying away from that which draws us away from Him, and pray for His protection from our enemy, Satan.)

Luther's explanation of the Sixth Petition: "God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.” [Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism App* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).]

What does Luther say about the Lord’s Prayer?

Excerpts from Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism provided above.

Challenge: Pray through this prayer over the next week. Take just one verse each day, and take time to meditate on what each portion of the prayer means, how God has answered or shown its truth, or how it applies to your needs or to someone else’s needs.

II. Praying the Scriptures

Often, when we are asked to pray with, or for someone, we may feel uncomfortable because we don’t know what to say. We have been encouraged to remember our relationship with God as our heavenly Father when we pray. For those blessed with a good and healthy parental experience, going to our father with requests and needs wasn’t a hard or frightening thing – it was perfectly natural. Can anyone remember a time when your father encouraged you to come to talk, to ask for help, or to confess when you had done something wrong? When you felt very bold, did you ever remind him of promises he had made to you? But earthly fathers cannot measure up to perfection like our heavenly Father.

Our heavenly Father wants us to talk with Him in a natural way, and we can be confident our “Abba” will not withhold or withdraw love as we are open and honest with Him. Rather, He will draw us closer. As we look in His Word, we are reminded of His promises, His love, His power, and His plans for us. The following are examples of ways to use Scripture to help us talk to our heavenly Father.

1. **Topical** — If you are seeking guidance in a specific area, you can look in a Bible concordance for passages dealing with the topic and then use those passages to direct your prayers confidently because you have God’s direction straight from His Word. Look up the references for each of these topics. How can these Scriptures guide your prayers?

Leader: Ask for one or two volunteers to share a simple, one or two sentence prayer based on one of these verses:

Guidance — Psalm 32:8; Proverbs 16:9; Isaiah 28:26; Isaiah 30:21; Isaiah 42:16

Protection — Deuteronomy 33:12; Psalm 91:9–10; Psalm 121:7–8

Peace — Psalm 85:8; John 14:27; Colossians 3:15; Philippians 4:7

2. **Personalizing Scripture** — You can actually turn a passage of the Bible into a prayer by integrating your name, or someone else's name, into the passage and then praying what God has stated in His Word.

Example: Lord God, I come to You in prayer for your servant, Donna. Please, Lord, fill her with the knowledge of Your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Guide her in her daily life, that she honors You and bears fruit through her work on Your behalf. Grant her strength as she taps into Your power, and endurance, patience, and joy in all that she does. I give thanks to You always, knowing that You, Father, have made her worthy of all this through the work of Your beloved Son, whose sacrifice on the cross provided for her redemption and forgiveness. (Paraphrased from Colossians 1:9–14.)

Practice adding your name or someone else's to one or two of the following verses:

John 3:16

2 Corinthians 1:3–4

Ephesians 1:15–19

Philippians 1:9–11

Challenge: Take another passage and write it into a prayer, either for someone specific or to be used when needed. Suggested passages are Ephesians 3:14–21, 4:1–9, or Acts 20:28. Or you may select a personal favorite.

Closing Prayer: Father, we thank You for sending Jesus Christ, for Your Word, and for the Holy Spirit's guidance enabling us to hear and learn of You. We also thank You for Your guidance in coming to You in prayer. Grant that we retain, apply, and share what we have learned, that we would bring glory to You, and that others would be drawn to Your love. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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