

## Transcript 122

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. We get a lot of questions about prayer, so we're going to be discussing some of the most frequent ones we receive that may point us to what our overall attitude towards prayer is supposed to be. If I were to describe a lot of the questions they are, how can I pray to get what I want. Or what's the, what's the perfect way to say this so that my prayer will be answered? Or even people who treat like an unanswered prayers if they did something wrong rather than trusting in God's will and God's timing?

Shea Houdmann

So joining me today is Gwen. Gwen is the administrator of compellingtruth.org and also Nelson who is the director of video content for God Questions Ministry. So Gwen, Nelson, welcome. Thanks for joining me today.

Nelson Domingues

Thanks for having, Shea.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, so, so prayer is supposed to be intimate communication between us and God. But way I look at it, if I were to come to say Gwen and every time I saw her I said like the exact same things to her. That wouldn't seem like we actually have a friendship, wouldn't seem like there's any sort relationship, seem very contractual, as if I'm just saying the same things because that's what I'm supposed to say. Well, prayer is supposed to be communication between two people. It's not supposed to be a laundry list of requests. It's not supposed to be a formula as if only saying in a certain way it's going to result in the answer, but that's really the misguided attitude that drives a lot of the questions we receive, so it can be a little sad sometimes, but it's also encouraging us that we get to point people to what prayer is really supposed to be.

Shea Houdmann

So Nelson, once you start us off and just a little bit of what Scripture says about the specific question, how to pray, because so many of the questions we receive are basically that question. How should I pray?

Nelson Domingues

You know, it's a really common concern that a lot of people have is, you know, what rules do I follow? Because I think we get kind of trapped in the the notion that if I don't follow the specific steps on how to pray, you know, perhaps the Bible lists this recorded way to do it and if I don't do exactly right, then all of a sudden, you know, God can hear my prayers or he'll be mad at me. You know, perhaps it'll be answered in the wrong way.

Nelson Domingues

And Scripture doesn't ask us to do anything like that. In fact, when the scriptures talk about prayer, there's hardly anywhere in the Bible it says, you know, specifically, here is the pattern that you should pray by. I mean we, we, we recognize even when I say that, you know, there is a pattern where Jesus says, you know, pray like this and we know that prayer in Matthew chapter six, we know as the Lord's Prayer, right? But even in the Lord's Prayer, Matthew Chapter 6, verses 5 through 15. We see a pattern of prayer. It's not a specific steps or instruction manual on pray in this exact way all the time.

Nelson Domingues

Because, I think you're right Shea, if I went to my parents or a friend or a colleague and I always said the same things when I was asking for, you know, anything I want and I think in a bit disingenuous, it's just repeating this mantra, right? And that's not what the Lord wants. He wants us to have a relationship with him. So even in the Lord's prayer in Matthew, chapter six we see Jesus praying and giving instruction, his disciples how to pray, but it's not the exact words that we're trying to mimic, it's the pattern, the heart attitude, process, the yearning, the desire of the outcome that he's really pointing to.

Nelson Domingues

And so we see him praying directly to God. Specifically right to the father. There's no middle ground. There's no interpreter. You know another person that He's to pray through. He doesn't have to go to the priest. He doesn't have to go to someone extra spiritual or someone who knows all the Christian words to say. Just pray directly in your own language, with your own words. God, he's not impressed with your vocabulary. He knows what your words are. He knows your hearts intentions. He already knows where you can ask for even before you ask him.

Nelson Domingues

But there's a love, a compassion that he has when he sees his child, his children just coming up to him and making a genuine request, speaking directly to their father because they know first of all that he loves them and that he wants to hear them and that he pays attention to them, that he's listening and that if our requests are according to his will and his plan, then he will grant them with joy and excitement and love.

Nelson Domingues

And so we go to him directly. Another way we see in the Lord's Prayer is we see this as humility. That's, that's offered there. I mean, obviously when we go to God, we're going to the creator of the universe. The one who's in control of all things, who can do all things, holds all things together. So we're going to see God and we're praying to him directly. And so there needs to be a bit of humbleness in us, and I think that comes automatically once you understand who you're speaking to, and the great power and the great love he has for you, even though he knows everything about you. He knows your ups and he knows your downs. He knows your goods and your bad, your sin. But the pravity of them all, he knows everything, but yet he yearns to be with you. And that should just spark in us a sense of deep humility as we come before God, knowing that even though he knows my wicked ways and the ways I fail, he still wants to hear me. And he still loves me, and he yearns to be with me. And so we pray directly to our father. We pray humbly to him, knowing that he is so good and so loving and so perfect and there's no sin in him. And yet he knows our hearts and and the wickedness and ourselves.

Nelson Domingues

But we also pray earnestly, right, and so we see that in the Lord's prayer as well. There's no question whether or not he can do it. There's no question whether or not he's powerful enough to do it. There's none of that. We know he can. We know he's all powerful. He we know he's all knowing. We know he desires to help it, so we pray earnestly. And what I mean by that is that we pray in such a way that we understand that he can grant these things and it's it's a way to express our faith knowing that Lord, if I pray these prayers, this, these words to you, if I if I offer this, this, gratitude or I offer this, or make this request, then I know you will grant it to me. Because if it's in your will, then you want to grant it to me. And so we pray earnestly.

Nelson Domingues

And sometimes that means praying over a period of time, because maybe God is asking us to to express our beliefs or express our desire over a longer period of time so that he can help us to understand that sometimes things take a little while. Sometimes he might answer those prayers right away, or sometimes he says no. Either way, we still pray earnestly, knowing that he can and we desire to hear his answer for us.

Nelson Domingues

And so is there a right way specifically to pray that you have to pray in these exact steps. No, of course not. But there is a heart condition and there's a way we approach God. There's there's a way that we say these words in the sense where we use our language, not some made-up language not trying to impress anyone. Not trying to be the person at the the prayer meeting that has all the eloquent words. God, again, he's not impressed by any of that. He just wants our heart. He wants to speak to us. And so how do we pray? Just like I'm talking to you right now, just openly, honestly, you know, completely vulnerable and and the Lord looks at those things and he enjoys to see the faith that his children have as they come to him in that way.

Nelson Domingues

And so that's one of the ways we see Scripture talking about how to pray. And there's many other examples in Scripture as well, I think Gwen you had mentioned one earlier too.

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, well, just kind of backing up to what you said. I love that mixture of humility and earnestness. Because one thing I think about is the Bible encourages us to pray with confidence, like in Hebrews 4:14 through 16 and then Hebrews 10:19 through 23. And that comes out of knowing who we are in Christ. And our relationship with God, like you said He invites us into prayer. And so yeah, so there's that humility like, this is the God of the universe, but there's also that confidence that this is the God who loves me.

Gwen Sellers

And I think we do see those in the example that has come to mind for me before of in the Old Testament, King Hezekiah in so it's second Kings 19. And the situation was that Sennacherib had attacked, you know, basically taunted the Israelites and then God through, I think it was through Isaiah?

No, yeah, yeah, through Isaiah, you know, told Hezekiah, like, it's going to be OK and, you know, and that king did go away and it wasn't attacking anymore. But then he sent a letter. You know, like, don't think you're really rescued. I'm still going get you. And so Hezekiah was afraid. And so what he did was he just took the letter and he went to the temple and he laid it before the Lord and was like, God, here's what they're saying. Look at all these taunts. Please save us.

Gwen Sellers

So there were no magic words. There was no specific, God this is what I want you to do. This is how I want you to solve the problem. It was just very humbly and confidently coming before the Lord like this is a problem, I need you. And I think we see similar prayers in the Psalms of just people being so honest before the Lord. Like here's the situation, here are my emotions. And then also remembering who God is and praising him for it and just trusting him with the situation.

Shea Houdmann

I think the most powerful example that comes to my mind, other than the two that you have mentioned is in the Book of Nehemiah, that throughout the book there's no like time where Nehemiah really utters a, other I think chapter one, like a really long prayer that he does like I guess what we'd almost call like popcorn prayers in that he'll be facing situation and you pray something really briefly like Lord help me or help me to know what to do or defeat them before they are attempting to go against you. Those type of things. It's not some long elaborate drawn out thing is, this is like Lord, I don't know what to do please help. And each time of course, God answers those prayers and guides Nehemiah and accomplishes his purpose through him. But I think Nehemiah for me, is a powerful reminder that prayer can be something we can be doing all the time. Like the verse in, oh boy, Philippians, I think that pray continually.

Gwen Sellers

1st Thessalonians 5:17.

Shea Houdmann

Thank you, Gwen, First Thessalonians where we can't like be on our knees with our eyes closed, praying continually like that. But we can have a continual attitude of prayer and that anytime we face something during the day where we're unsure or something good happens when like thank you Lord, that is a perfectly acceptable prayer. Those 3 words right there. Lord, help me. Another quick, easy prayer. If God wants our hearts, he wants us to be communicating with him about what's going on in our lives. It's not has to be some flowery official thing where we start off with Heavenly Father and end with in Jesus name, Amen.

Shea Houdmann

I mean, he's more interested in the attitude behind us saying those things, then actually uttering those words as if there's some sort of magic power behind them. But we have to pray a certain way in order for things to happen.

Nelson Domingues

Yeah, I think it's amazing. You know, when we think about the cross and what happened during that time as Jesus hung on the cross and scriptures, room temp remind us, they tell us that the temple

curtain was torn in two. And every time I think of that, I know it's a symbol of access right, in the old temple and no testament you had to go to this temple and get a, go to the priest and they interceded for you between you and God and so to pray then it was often having to go to a priest and make sacrifices and having him intercede for you and provide the sin offerings and all sorts of things like that that lose the mediator between you and God and that that temple was the curtain. And that really kind of separated the people from his presence. And on the cross when Jesus died for us, we see that, that curtain just torn in two and just this beautiful image, right top down, God doing it for us, down to man. Just providing us this access to him so we can pray to him. We don't have to go to a specific place. We don't have to have this special formula. We don't have to pray in a certain way. We have complete 100% access.

Nelson Domingues

God is everywhere, omnipresent, all powerful, all knowing. And so those little prayers that you're talking about, just thank you. Help me. What should I do? Help me make this decision. Guard my heart. Move my eyes. You know, whatever it is that we pray during the day, all these little micro prayers are little kind of like flares or shots in the sky. And it's not even that distant, right 'cause on a flare you kind of shoot up to someone far away so they see it. Our prayers. God is near. He's present. All those who draw on God, who call on God, He draws near to them and so that's the beauty of it. You can whisper a prayer, a word, and he hears it. You can think your prayer and he hears it. You could scream it in anger. And he hears it, right? And so it doesn't matter how we express it as long as our heart attitude is correct if. We're talking to.

Nelson Domingues

So yeah, praying those little micro prayers all throughout the day is a great way to continually foster our relationship with God. But doesn't say that those long extended times of prayer aren't beneficial, right? I think we've all been in different places where spending some time alone with the Lord is, is a huge blessing and we see Jesus doing that and we were talking about how to pray so we can pray with these little micro prayers.

Nelson Domingues

But then there's other times where we can go to a quiet, solitary place, we can shut the doors so others don't see. They don't need to hear our words, and we are alone with our father in heaven. We pray to him. Scripture talks about these things. Jesus exemplifies those things as he prayed by himself off and in the garden of Gethsemane, Mount of Olives. We see all these different places in Scripture where he does that exact thing. Again, more examples of people praying, not specific ways that we have to maintain. Prayer is not some cookie cutter thing. Is simply expressing our hearts to God. And we can do that wherever we are.

Gwen Sellers

And I think that, I mean, all the examples in Scripture I think really are instructional for us in terms of what things should we pray for. I mean like you're talking about Jesus's prayer. So in John 17, you see this is Jesus's heart and I mean, you know and for us. So you see his deep love for us, but the newer testament epistles have oftentimes prayers at the beginnings and the ends and you know they're talking for like for people knowledge of God to be deepened for their love of him to grow.

Gwen Sellers

So so that's not to say that we don't pray for practical things. I mean the Lord's prayer has been praying for Our Daily Bread. So we can certainly pray for practical, specific things, but we also pray for character change and for God's will in the world. You know, for I think it's first. Yeah, first, Timothy two talks about praying for all people, praying for our leaders. So there's just like so many examples of what to pray for. And then I find Romans 8:26 through 30 really encouraging of you're talking about access to God's presence. If you're in Christ, you have the indwelling Holy Spirit so he even like instructs us how to pray, and he intercedes for us.

Gwen Sellers

And then, as you keep reading those verses, you get the the assurance that all things work out for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose. And then it talks about how God transforms us. And to me that shows, you know, that, like, that prayer isn't a formula, that it's about relationships and that ultimately it's about our transformations. It's not just how do I say the right word so God gives me what I want? It's how do I enter into a deeper relationship with this God who loves me?

Nelson Domingues

Yeah, that reminds me of in Luke 17 verses 11 through 19 we have, you know, the the story of the Jesus cleansing the 10 lepers, right? And so they all cry out to Jesus, 10 leopards. They all have the disease and need healing from him. So they call out to God. Right. They're calling out to Jesus asking for healing earnestly because they know he can heal them. Well He gives them instructions and get cleanse and and 9 of them runoff cleanse, but yet the 10th one, who also has cleanse returns back to Jesus. And so then 9 only get answered to prayer, but the one goes back and also receives Jesus, and so he also gets that time with him, that relationship with him and the blessings of being with him.

Nelson Domingues

Our prayers are not just about making some lists of requests that of things that we get, it's about being with God. What relationship could you possibly have with anyone if you didn't communicate with them? I mean, that wouldn't be a healthy marriage. That wouldn't be a healthy father, son, father, daughter relationship in any sort of sense. You have to communicate and communicate often, and we see that whenever he goes back and he builds and develops that relationship with Jesus. So he he gets healed, which is great, but he gets the greater thing, which is also Jesus.

Gwen Sellers

And I think it's interesting how prayer not only develops our relationship with God, but I find that it even develops deeper community, I mean, you know, looking back again at the Lord's prayer, our Father, so this is something that they're doing together. And when we pray with other people, just the the sense of connection that that brings, and I think to when we pray for other people, that's one way of bearing their burdens with them, because we're, we're bringing it to God in prayer you know in solidarity with them. But I find that oftentimes God uses that. You know, it's like, hey, as I was praying for you, God brought this to mind. And it's like a solution for that person. Or you're praying for them and they're on your mind and then you realize, you know, like, Oh well, this person sick. Like, I could probably help

them with a meal. And you know you just, you don't have those connections if you're not praying for and with other people.

Shea Houdmann

Uh, Gwen, I think that's an excellent point. Reminds me of a question I saw in the system the other day. This one was asking for, can you send me a prayer I can pray to get this? I don't remember what it was, but it's like. So imagine that like when Nelson saying in any relationship, so imagine me holding a piece of paper. So Nelson hello, how are you today? I would really like to borrow your lawnmower. Is that OK? I mean, like, even if you're asking for something, reading something that someone else wrote sounds so strange.

Shea Houdmann

So to approach prayer that way. I'm not saying praying a written prayer is wrong. I mean, if they're truly how you feel, and just having a written prayer helps you express that, that is completely fine. But to ask someone else to like, write a prayer for you. That I think really misses the point of what prayer is supposed to be, I mean. There's been amazingly well written, powerful prayers have been written over the millennia of Christianity. But again, not saying that it's wrong to go that route, but I think it is misguided in the sense that God wants our hearts, he wants to have communication with us. So unless it's using a written prayer and actually truly communicating our hearts, I'm not saying that God is dishonored or that he's upset or angry if we do that. But I think it misses the intimacy of what prayer is supposed to be. And that was like, my biggest encouragement to the person who asked the question was like, I'm not going to give you a written prayer, but I mean here, here's what the Bible says about how to pray according to God's will and the principles that gives on how to even ask for something that you want or need. Which, again, it's not wrong, it's so many prayers in the Bible are people asking God for something.

Shea Houdmann

So petitioning God is definitely a major aspect of prayer but it's the attitude that we really want to focus on today, and that getting to the point of let's focus on this is a relationship we have with God, and therefore communication should look like how we talk to someone with whom we have an intimate relationship.

Gwen Sellers

Well, I do think, yeah, so I did. It really is about the heart attitude because I think it can be really instructional for us to read the prayers in the Bible or even to hear other people pray. And you know, we, we learn from practice and from watching and you know, like kids. It's like, yeah, parents pray with their kids in part to help their kids learn how to pray, which is what we do in other relationships too, right?

Gwen Sellers

Like we watch other people interact and see, oh, like, here's how these kind of conversations work. But yeah, but never as a script. Like, oh, when I'm in a conflict, this is the script that I use. It's no we watch other people resolve their conflicts and kind of get some ideas or some language from that. So I think

that's what those written prayers are useful for is, you know here are some examples or like some language that you might use. But yeah, but it's never a script that you read to God. It should just be in.

Nelson Domingues

It's like poetry and I could read amazing poems to my wife. I love poems and that are eloquent, that use words that I wouldn't know how to use, that put words and phrases together that I don't know how to do so well. And, and she might really appreciate them, but I think over time, if I only read her other peoples words to express my love to her, I think she would rather hear my own words. Even if they're a little messy. Even if they don't sound as eloquent. Even if they don't have the same cadence and pattern and beauty as some really well thought out poem from some master artist. Again, my wife would want to hear my words. She would want to hear my heart, my expressions, the way I think. And I think she would, in fact, I know she would far, greatly, far greater appreciate that than only speaking to her in someone else is words.

Nelson Domingues

Oh yeah, reading written prayers are really good. They have lots of instruction. They can be beautiful like a poem. They can help us to even think about different ways to pray as we are praying to the Lord, but I think we shouldn't run to them exclusively for our communication with God. He really wants to hear our hearts.

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, yeah, they're a tool, not the way to pray.

Nelson Domingues

Right.

Shea Houdmann

I think in here's something that's maybe not a question I think I've ever actually seen, that we've received but something I've observed, especially in younger people or new believers who like the first time they're ever asked to pray, like in a public setting. And oftentimes they're very nervous because they, they don't know what to say, and whenever I'm, I occasionally will substitute and lead our churches youth group. And whenever we have a prayer time, I purposefully don't pray in any sort of lack of a, better eloquent way. I try to pray very simple, down to earth, so I don't want them to feel like well, I can't pray as well as Shea can and so I'm just I don't want to say anything at all.

Shea Houdmann

It's like some of the most refreshing prayers I've ever heard are from new believers who really praying is very new to them and they're just talking to God like he's an actual person that they want to talk to you and that's this amazing. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with praying eloquently. I've heard some beautiful, amazing prayers from seasoned believers who have an intimate relationship with God that I can definitely look up to and emulate.

Shea Houdmann

But sometimes we need to even I don't know be careful is the right way of describing it, but be wary of the people around us that we don't want to make it seem like in order to pray, you have to be able to pray using amazingly poetic, beautiful words like no. Prayer can be you can talk to God just like you talked to anyone else. And obviously we don't want to forget God is holy. God is the creator of the universe. We want to show him respect and awe when we talk to him, but that doesn't mean we can't still approach him like he's our loving Heavenly Father who wants to have communion with us.

Shea Houdmann

For me, that was a very powerful reminder, just being wary of how I pray around others to make sure I'm not trying to sound like I'm some amazing Christian who knows the best way to pray. Like, no, I'd rather emulate what prayer supposed to be a legitimate, personal, intimate communication between me and God.

Nelson Domingues

I think as we think about prayer and the question of how do I pray? And I think a lot of reasons that people ask that question is because they've tried praying in the past and maybe whatever they prayed they didn't get the answer for that they were seeking, or they're immediately happening. So they're looking for a way to get what they want, because maybe they tried it and it didn't happen. And I think it's a powerful reminder in Second Corinthians chapter 12, verses 7 through 9. Here you have the apostle Paul, right? I mean, he is, obviously a person who knows God, who is friends with God. A person who's who's obedient to God, who's living out his life, giving everything he has to walk in the ways of God, right? And so that here's an ultra spiritual Christian. Right. No doubt that he knows how to pray, but yeah, in this passage he's praying to remove this thorn from his flesh. And it says in verse eight, you know 3 times I pleaded with the Lord about this that it should leave me. But he said to me, my Grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. And in verse 7, right in the beginning, he says to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, meaning that the Lord did not answer his prayer. The Lord denied the request to remove the thorn, and it wasn't because he was praying wrong, it wasn't because he used the wrong words in the wrong order at the wrong place, or the wrong volume, or the wrong posture, or anything like that. It was simply because it wasn't the will of God at that moment to take away that thorn in his flesh. God was using some pain in his life to point him in the direction that he wanted him to go.

Nelson Domingues

And so as we pray and think about how do I pray? It's not just about how do I pray so I get what I want. It's about how do I communicate with God and hear his yeses and hear his nos and hear his wait and still know that I'm communicating with my father. And I think Paul illustrates that perfectly in 2nd Corinthians 12 here where he understands, hey, I pleaded with the Lord. I've asked multiple times. I've been obedient. I've walked along the path but yet God is doing something greater than removing this thorn ever could, and so I need to be ok with it.

Nelson Domingues

It that's what it means to pray in God's will. We have to be OK with all of these things. With his yes. With his no's. With His waits and and we say pray in his will, that's what it is. This that we know he knows all. He sees all. He's all powerful. He's far more intelligent than we are. He knows what's going on. He knows

where we're going and so we trust Him even in our prayers and we trust even his no's, knowing that he loves us and he wants good things for us in accordance to his will and his plan. And so yes, it's not a specific way to phrase you get what you want. It's a way that we simply communicate and be receptive of his answer to us.

Gwen Sellers

One of it that brings to mind Ephesians 3:20 through 21 I heard Priscilla Shirer talk about it one time. So that's the now to him, who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask, seek, imagine or think be glory and oh, maybe I even have it. Well, anyway, so. And just the way she presented it kind of sounded like like God here I am. And here's what I'm praying for. Or just blow my socks off. You know, sometimes we. So like, oh or God's will be done. It kind of as a cop out for if this prayer isn't what you want, then like, I guess that's fine. But I think when we change our mind like Paul did of ok, God will is so much better. So he didn't remove this thorn from my flesh that I wanted because he's doing something so much better. And so when we reframe it like that I think that helps us to look for what is that better thing that God's doing and helps us to deepen our faith and trust in him.

Shea Houdmann

Gwen Nelson, thank you for the excellent conversation and hopefully our conversation today is that we encourage you, helps you to know a little bit more about how to have a conversation with God 'cause that's what prayer is supposed to be.

Shea Houdmann

It's been the Got Questions podcast on how to pray. Again, I hope our talk today will lead you into more intimate relationship with God, specifically in in how you pray. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.