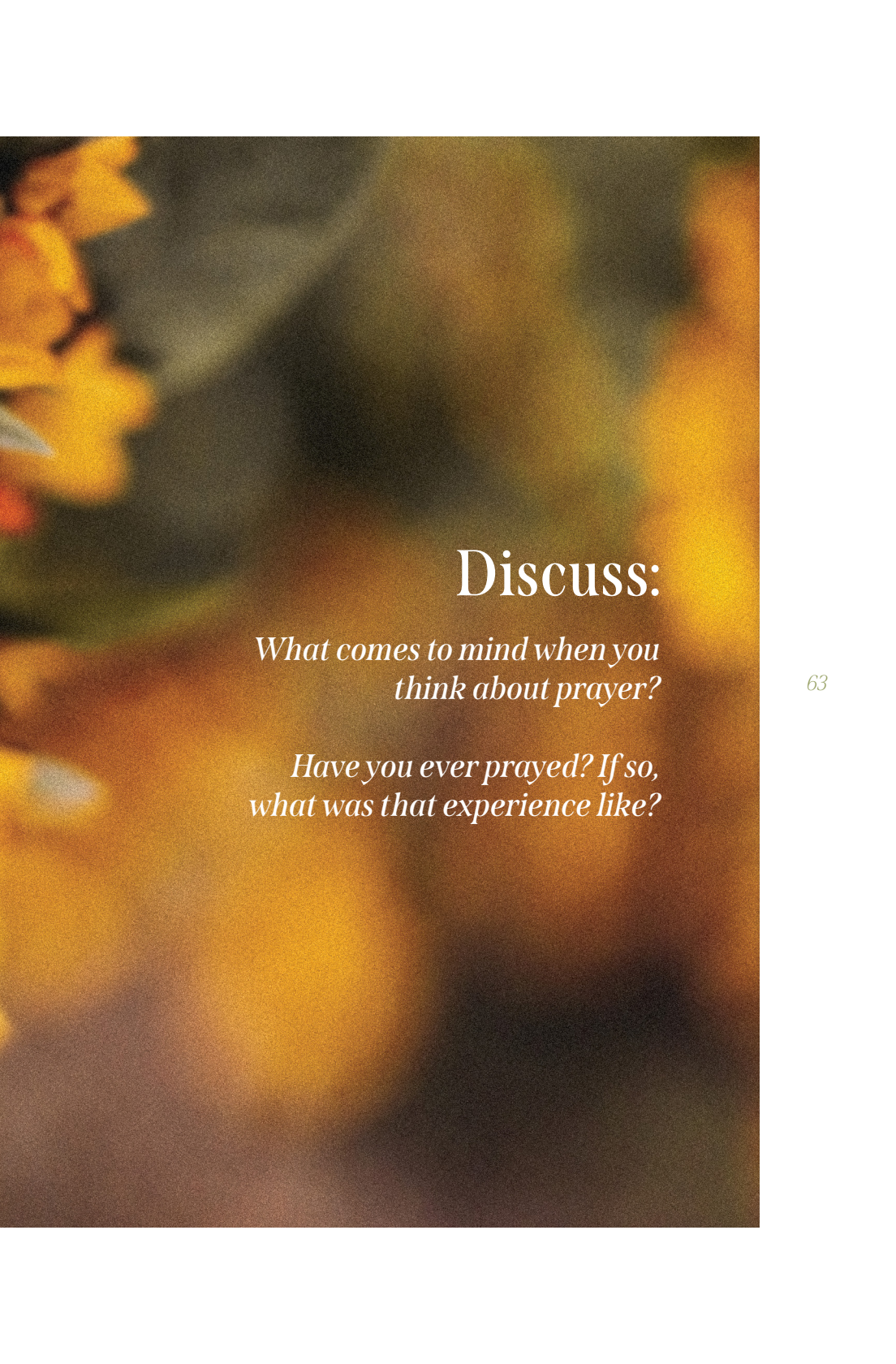


08

Prayer

How do I talk to God?



Discuss:

*What comes to mind when you
think about prayer?*

*Have you ever prayed? If so,
what was that experience like?*



As a Father, God longs for His Children to come to Him. He intends for you to live with Him and desire to be near Him. Prayer – which literally means talking with God – draws us into that relationship. When you asked Him to search your heart, you prayed. You asked God to show you how He sees people: This was a prayer as well. It is through prayer that we communicate with God. Prayer takes many forms: it can be a word of thanks or a time of worship, a cry of desperation or a request for guidance.

Like any conversation, prayer requires both talking and listening. Sometimes, it looks like you pouring out your heart to your Father; other times, it might entail quieting your heart and listening for His voice. In whatever form, it is the main means by which we come to God. The book of Hebrews paints a picture of what prayer literally looks like:

“Since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...let us... then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

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When we pray, it is as if we are entering into the throne room of a great king. We have no right to come before Him on our own and yet, we are beckoned to come. Our access into this throne room is through Jesus. Because Christ justified us through His death, God now sees us based on Christ's righteousness and not based on our own sin or merit. As a result, we are given free access to the throne room as a child of the King.

Read Matthew 6:5-13; Read Luke 11:1-4

In these passages, we find Jesus teaching His disciples about prayer. At first, prayer seems mysterious and intimidating. How do you approach a Being who is both your Father and your Creator, your Friend and your King? In our uncertainty, we sometimes avoid prayer, leaving it to the “experts” or thinking that we somehow need to be better before we come to God. Jesus makes it clear that prayer is not a show or about getting other people's attention. When asked how to pray, Jesus started by using the

word Father. By starting here, Christ establishes the attitude with which we should approach God—like an unassuming child going before a loving dad. A child doesn't worry about whether his dad wants him there or if he is asking too much or too little. A child goes to his dad assuming that his father loves him and wants to be near to him. Christ beckons us to come as we are and pour out our hearts.

After establishing Him as Father, Christ reminds us of who our Father is: “who is in Heaven, Hallowed be your name.” While He is our Father, we have to remember that He is also God. Hallowed means to honor as holy. He is not like us. We are on earth; He is in heaven. Sometimes we will ask Him for things we think are necessary for our livelihood. As our Father and Creator, He might disagree. This doesn't negate His desire for us to ask Him anyway. When we recognize Him as God, we realize He is ultimate and we are not. This shapes what we ask for and enables us to ask the next part of this prayer: “your kingdom come.” At the end of the day, we are here to further His kingdom. We should be seeking to ask in line with what God wants for us and our world. Worshiping God for who He is reorients our hearts toward His purposes and changes our perspective on what we want for ourselves.

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Read Luke 11:5-13

Jesus affirms the picture in Hebrews of approaching God in prayer with confidence, audacity even. He seems to say that we should keep asking almost to the point of being annoying. God wants us to ask Him for anything. He tells us to ask, seek, and knock. He wants us to make requests of Him. He wants us to go to Him when we have needs and He wants us to ask Him to take care of us. In a relationship with Him, our asking can be a form of worship for it shows that we need Him, that we are incapable of functioning without Him and that we trust in His provision. Sometimes we might be tempted to shift our focus from having a relationship to getting what we want. Know that He wants to give us good things, but He wants us to seek Him and not the gifts He might give. He might not give us exactly what we ask, but when God is our focus we can trust that He knows what is best.

As we journey with Him in prayer, He transforms us and aligns our desires with His own. He teaches us how to pray and guides us on what to ask Him for. The more we pray, the more we will trust our Father. The more we trust Him, the closer we come to Him, and the more we will start to look like Him. As a result, prayer is a central part of walking with God. You can't expect to have a good relationship with someone if you do not spend time with them, talk with them, or listen to what they have to say. A relationship cannot survive without communication. The same principles apply to your relationship with God. Pour your heart out to Him, and leave room to listen to His quiet voice. In John 10, Jesus likens us to sheep who know and listen to their shepherd's voice: "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me." You must actively talk to Him and you must actively listen to Him.

Practically, there are many methods of prayer. We praise God for who He is (adoration), thank Him for what He has done (thanksgiving), and come clean and ask for His forgiveness when we sin (confession). We also look to God for help with our needs (petition) or ask Him requests on behalf of the people around us (intercession). As we walk with God, our prayers change and grow. Don't get wrapped up in "praying rightly", but simply recognize who God is and then just talk to Him. If you get discouraged, keep trying. God sent His Son so that you could come before Him. Christ died so that you may be brought to God. The Bible specifically teaches us how to pray. The Holy Spirit was given to live in you and help you in your weaknesses. When you don't know how to pray, make that a prayer.

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The book of Romans promises that the Spirit Himself speaks for you when you don't have the words to say. While you make intercession for others, the Spirit of God intercedes for you. There is no excuse for prayerlessness. God wants you to enter His presence and He has taken away every obstacle that might prevent your coming. Go to Him. The single best way to learn about prayer is to start praying.

ACTION STEPS

For the next 5 days, devote each day to a different aspect of prayer. All of these types of prayer are an essential part of your relationship with God:

Day One:

Start by spending today praising God for who He is. Go for a walk. As you walk around, revel in God as Creator. Pay attention to the plants and animals you see and take time to enjoy them. Download the hymn *How Great thou Art* and pray the lyrics as you sing. Lastly, read Psalm 145 aloud to God.

Day Two:

In Greek, confess means to agree with. In confessing, you are agreeing with God where you have sinned, repenting of that sin, and letting Him clean you of that sin. Today, read Psalm 51 as a prayer. Think about your life and confess to God the areas where you have sinned this week. Trust that if you confess your sins, He will forgive you and cleanse you (1 John 1:9).

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Day Three:

We have been given more than we can ever know. Today, make a list of all the good things you have in your life. Try to continually be thankful all day today. Write out a prayer of things that you have to be thankful for.

Day Four:

Pray for the people God has put in your life. God wants us to bring the needs of other people before Him as well. As you go about your day, pray for the people you see. Pray that God would reveal Himself to them somehow during the day and that they could become aware of His love for them. Ask your family and friends how they are doing and if they have anything they would like you to pray for.

Day Five:

Today, ask for yourself. Ask God as a Father who loves you and wants to surprise you with His goodness. Ask with annoying audacity. Pray that your desires would line up with what God wants for you.

