

## PRAYING POWERFULLY AND SIMPLY

Rev. Joseph M. Esper

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A boy wanting to clean up a vacant lot and turn it into a ball-field was trying to move a large stone out of the way, but no matter how he tried, he couldn't budge it. His father was watching him, and asked, "Are you sure you are using all your strength?" "Yes, I am," the boy insisted, but the father corrected him, saying, "No, you are not—you haven't asked me." Too many people try to remove or overcome life's obstacles without relying on the greatest resource available to them: the assistance of their Heavenly Father. Prayer is the means by which we ask for God's help; prayer also allows us to come closer to Him by thanking Him for His blessings, asking forgiveness for our sins, interceding on behalf of others, and adoring Him and praising Him for His goodness.

Many times, however, the idea of prayer intimidates us; we make it harder than it has to be. A well-educated, self-important pastor always tried to impress his congregation by praying in lofty, abstract language that no one could understand. Finally an exasperated older woman interrupted him by tugging on his sleeve and saying, "Oh, for Pete's sake—just call God 'Father' and ask Him for something!" That's very good advice, for in giving His disciples the Our Father, Jesus instructed them not to multiply empty words, but to pray simply and from the heart (Mt. 6:7-8). In the words of a Jesuit priest (Fr. Willie Doyle), "Make your prayer simple, as simple as you can. Reason little, love much, and you will pray well." An important historical example demonstrating this truth is seen in the dedication of the national cemetery at the site of the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863. The famous and highly-esteemed orator Edward Everett spoke for two hours that November day—but today no one remembers his eloquent speech. However, all Americans have heard of—and many of us can recite at least part from memory—the short, 87 word speech which followed: Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

In the words of the famous 17th century Christian author John Bunyan, "In prayer, it is better to have a heart without words than words without heart." Prayer is nothing without the personal presence of the one praying. A little boy had been begging favors of his father all day long, and once more came into his dad's office. "What do you want this time?" asked the weary parent, but to the father's surprise and delight, the child simply said, "Daddy, I don't want anything—I just want to be with you." This is the nature of prayer: seeking to be with God—and if, while in His presence, we have something to talk about, our words should be as simple as possible. St. Jane Frances de Chantal tells us, "Follow your own way of speaking to Our Lord sincerely, lovingly, confidently, and simply, as your heart dictates." This was the method of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who said, "I tell God what I want quite simply, without any splendid turn of phrase, and somehow He always manages to understand me." Echoing this approach, Pope John XXIII (who will be officially canonized next month on April 27) said, "Praying is the rising of the mind to God. We must always remember this. The actual words matter less."

If, like me, you're older than 55, you may very well remember watching on TV the lunar landing of Apollo 11 on July 20, 1969—the first time a man set foot on the moon. What you probably didn't know is that during this and the other Apollo missions to the moon, the spaceships were off course more than 90% of the time—but through constant communication with Mission Control in Houston, they were able to make the necessary course corrections. In the same way, we are off course much of the time during our journey through life—but through constant communication with God, we can make the frequent adjustments needed to stay on the proper path. Prayer allows us to do this.

A short anonymous quote says, “Prayer is the key to the morning and the bolt of the evening”; another anonymous quote assures us that “A day hemmed in prayer is less likely to become unraveled.” I especially like another quote—a longer one by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. He says, “Prayer is not a stratagem for occasional use, a refuge to resort to now and then. It is rather like an established residence for the innermost self. All things have a home; the bird has a nest, the fox has a hole, the bee has a hive. A soul without prayer is a soul without a home. . . . To pray is to open a door where both God and the soul may enter.”

Prayer is important for each of us, for St. Cyprian, in referring to Jesus, said, “If He Who was without sin prayed, how much more ought sinners to pray!” St. John Vianney made this same point by using imagery familiar to his parishioners, most of whom were farmers. The Cure d' Ars said, “The man who doesn't pray is like a chicken or turkey, which can't rise into the air. They may fly a little, but they soon have to come down, they scratch the earth and get deeper and deeper into it, they cover their heads with it and they don't seem to take pleasure in anything else. The man who prays, on the other hand, is like a fearless eagle, and seems always to want to get closer to the sun.” A more contemporary author, the Benedictine Hubert Van Zeller, tells us, “If you do not pray, everything can disappoint you by going wrong. If you do pray, everything can still go wrong, but not in a way that will disappoint you.” In other words, prayer gives us the strength and perspective to cope with life's difficulties and setbacks. As St. Frances Xavier Cabrini noted, “We must pray without tiring, for the salvation of mankind does not depend on material success; nor on sciences that cloud the intellect. Neither does it depend on arms and human industries, but on Jesus alone.” Our prayers—or the lack of them—truly make a difference in the world; they also determine the course of our own lives. According to the saintly French mathematician Blaise Pascal, “All the troubles of life come upon us because we refuse to sit quietly for a while each day in our rooms.”

We *need* to pray—but it has to be done in a humble and trusting spirit, not a demanding one. According to an author named Kenneth Wilson, “We have created God in the image of a divine bellhop. Prayer, for us, is the ultimate in room service, wrought by direct dialing. Furthermore, no tipping, and everything is charged to that great credit card in the sky. Now prayer is many things, but I'm pretty sure this is not one of the things it is.” Mr. Wilson is quite right; prayer isn't about our will, but God's will—and we must learn to conform ourselves to it. Another author uses the analogy of children learning to color; at first they don't always choose appropriate colors, and they have difficulty staying within the lines. As they get better at coloring, however, they become capable of

producing some very beautiful and satisfying pictures. This author, Michael Green, continues, “As children of our Heavenly Father, our prayer life often resembles a child’s coloring. At first, we don’t know what to pray for nor do our prayers stay within the guidelines of His will. As we mature and continue praying, though, we pray for the right things and stay within His will, resulting in a satisfying prayer life.” According to St. Teresa of Avila, “All that should be sought for in the exercise of prayer is conformity of our will and the Divine Will, in which consists the highest perfection.” God has arranged it so that the more we pray, the easier it becomes to understand and accept His plan for our lives—and in terms of seeing the “big picture,” St. Augustine reminds us that “even though God doesn’t always give us what we want, He gives us what we need for our salvation.” We can always trust God to give us what is truly best for us, and so we can pray with confidence—for as someone (Richard C. Trench) noted, “Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance but cooperating with His willingness.”

You may recall the story from the Book of Genesis about the patriarch Jacob’s dream in which he saw angels going up to and descending from Heaven by means of a staircase or ladder (28:10-15). St. Francis de Sales uses this as an analogy of spiritual growth, for he says, “Jacob’s ladder . . . is a faithful representation of the devout life. The two sides between which we ascend, and which support the steps, are prayer, which bring the love of God, and the Sacraments that confer it. The steps are but the various degrees of charity by which we advance from virtue to virtue, either descending in action to the aid of our neighbor, or ascending in contemplation to a loving union with God.” In other words, there’s supposed to be a close union or link between our personal prayer and our reception of the Sacraments through the Church, and our acts of charity, through which we recognize and serve Christ in the people around us. As the late Rev. Richard John Neuhaus—a Lutheran minister who became a Catholic priest—said, “There is no such thing as private prayer; there is only prayer in private.” Genuine prayer, whether offered alone or in the presence of others, always strengthens the unity between Christ and His Church, thereby bringing us closer to God and to each other.

What constitutes genuine prayer? In the 1960s a man in Cleveland was serving time in prison for murder, and decided that if he faked a religious conversion it might persuade the parole board to give him an early release. He began going through the motions in as convincing a manner as possible, reading the Bible, leading prayer meetings, and starting a religious discussion group. One day he realized he couldn’t fake it anymore—God had become so real to him that he actually *wanted* to pray, and he began doing so because he needed to and because he enjoyed it. As it happened, he did receive a parole in 1967; he immediately joined the Capuchins, became a religious brother, and began conducting religious retreats for inmates in prison. Prayer doesn’t change God; it changes us—sometimes in unexpected and even miraculous ways. The more we open our hearts to God’s will, the more effective and satisfying our prayer becomes. One author (E. Stanley Jones) says, “If I throw out a boat hook and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore? Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to God.” If we understand the value and importance of self-surrender, we see that our prayer is always heard—for as another author (George Meredith) notes, “Whoever rises from prayer a better man, his prayer is answered.”

Nothing worthwhile—even with the best intentions—can be accomplished without prayer. A Christian woman wanted to bring her agnostic husband into a loving relationship with Jesus, but he constantly made fun of her religious faith. Someone gave her some good advice: “Don’t talk to your husband about God; talk to God about your husband.” Praying should automatically become our first step whenever we have to do or decide something important, and our first reaction whenever something challenging or unpleasant happens to us. A humorous but profound observation was made the actress Ethel Barrymore, who said, “When life knocks you to your knees—well, that’s the best position in which to pray, isn’t it?” Praying helps people cope with misfortune and tragedy, brings peace of mind to troubled souls, and gives persons strength to bear heavy crosses. In terms of our psychological well-being, praying regularly is a very healthy thing to do. Furthermore, over 1200 recent medical studies have shown that prayer has a positive effect on physical health—even in serious cases like cancer, AIDS, and heart disease; more than a few miracles have resulted from persistent and trusting prayer.

Prayer isn’t magic, of course; God is eager to bless us, but He expects us to do our part. Two girls were walking to school one morning when they suddenly realized that unless they hurried, they were going to be late. One of them suggested they stop and pray that they wouldn’t be tardy. The other girl, having just as much faith but a little more common sense, replied, “No, let’s pray while we run as fast as we can.” As one author (George Buttrick) noted, “Prayer is not a substitute for work, thinking, watching, suffering, or giving; prayer is a support for all other efforts.” In the words of St. Josemaría Escrivá, “Your prayer cannot stop at mere words. It has to lead to deeds and practical consequences.” Moreover, prayer has to be rooted in obedience to God; we can’t expect Him to ignore, let alone reward, our failure to do His will. A teenage boy was sneaking a cigarette when he saw his father coming. Hiding the cigarette and trying to act casual, he sought to distract his dad by pointing to a circus advertisement on a billboard and asking, “Can we go, Dad? Please, let’s go when it comes to town.” Knowing what was going on, the father replied in a soft but firm voice, “Son, never make a petition while at the same time trying to hide a smoldering disobedience.”

When we’re sincerely trying to do God’s will, and approaching Him in a spirit of honesty and humility, our prayer can be very powerful. According to the author Leonard Ravenhill, “One might estimate the weight of the world, tell the size of the celestial city, count the stars of Heaven, measure the speed of lightning, and tell the time of the rising and the setting of the sun—but you cannot estimate prayer-power. Prayer is as vast as God because He is behind it. Prayer is as mighty as God because He has committed Himself to answer it.” St. Pio of Pietrelcina—commonly known as Padre Pio—once said, “It is true that God’s power triumphs over everything, but humble and suffering prayer prevails over God Himself.” Because of the Lord’s infinite love for us, immense spiritual power is available to us—if we have faith. Too often, however, we don’t pray as much as we should, or with sufficient trust and perseverance—and in this way we put artificial limits on what God is able to do for us. A Christian was admiring the waterfall at Niagara Falls when a man standing next to him remarked, “You know, right there is

the greatest unused power in all the world.” The Christian said in reply, “No, I’m afraid I have to disagree with you. The greatest unused power in all the world is prayer!”

The president of a big and important religious organization was always involved in all sorts of meetings, conferences, phone calls, and other activities in the Name of Christ—but he sometimes wondered if he was truly accomplishing anything. One night he had a dream in which he died and went to Heaven. St. Peter met him at the pearly gates and greeted him, “Welcome, decoy!” “What do you mean ‘decoy’?” the man demanded, and St. Peter explained, “While you were having your meetings and conferences and seminars, you’ve been primarily a decoy. You see, you made such a big splash that Satan was fooled into directing his attacks against you. That left all the little old ladies praying secretly in their homes to fight the real war!” This story makes an important point: each of us can choose to be a spiritual warrior on the front lines of the battle going on all around us, without having to be religious leaders, or “holy,” or “important.” We don’t need to be out in the world making a big splash in order to make a big difference; by our fervent and persistent prayers for all the leaders and members of the Church, and for the leaders and citizens of our nation, we *are* serving God’s Kingdom in a powerful way.

However, Satan doesn’t want that happen, and so he desperately tries to divert, distract, or discourage us. As author Samuel Chadwick points out, “The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from our prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.” As another author (J. Hudson Taylor) notes, “Satan may build a wall around us, but he can’t put a roof over us to keep us from praying to God.” As long as we pray, the evil one is defeated; if we fail to pray, however, our enemy gains the upper hand. For this reason, persevering in prayer—especially when the devil is trying to discourage us by whispering that God isn’t listening, doesn’t love us, or has no intention of answering us—is extremely important. Scripture teaches us to pray always, without losing heart (Lk. 18:1)—for as Jesus says, “Everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened” (Mt. 7:8).

In terms of when and where to pray, it’s possible to pray anytime and anywhere: in church, while lying in bed, in a car while driving to work, while standing in the checkout line at the supermarket, and so on. Many people find it helpful to have one place in particular they use for prayer: perhaps a certain room in the house, a particular chair, or something similar. As far as when to pray, we can do so at any time, but it’s good to have a regular time each day; this sort of discipline and predictability is spiritually good for us. Some people prefer their main prayer time at the start the day; for others, it works better to end with prayer after a long day. The ideal is to pray *every day*, even if just for a few minutes; this sort of regularity is more valuable than praying at great length but only on irregular occasions. One’s posture in prayer may involve kneeling, sitting, or standing; it’s important to be physically comfortable (but not so comfortable that we fall asleep). Our mood in prayer should be one of openness, rather than seeing it as a burden or an obligation to fulfill. However, it’s very important to pray regularly *even when we don’t feel like it*—for if we wait until we’re in the perfect mood for prayer, we’ll rarely pray. In the words of Ruth Bell Graham (Dr. Billy Graham’s wife), “Pray when you feel

like it, for it is a sin to neglect such an opportunity. Pray when you don't feel like it, for it is dangerous to remain in such a condition." If we don't feel like praying, we should simply acknowledge this fact and incorporate it into our prayer; God won't be offended.

Someone asked a small boy if he prayed, and he answered truthfully, "Sometimes I pray, but sometimes I just say prayers." This is a valid and important distinction. Instead of going through the motions or willingly allowing ourselves to be distracted, we must try to be wholehearted in our prayer. St. Teresa of Avila said, "A prayer in which a person is not aware of Whom he is speaking to, what he is asking . . . and of Whom, I don't call prayer—however much the lips may move." This judgment builds upon that of St. Ignatius of Antioch, who at the beginning of the 2nd century wrote, "The essential, indisputable element in prayer is *attention*. Without attention there is no prayer. True attention, given by grace, comes when we make our heart dead to the world."

This, of course, can be very hard to do; even saints have to be on guard against distractions when praying. One day St. Bernard was traveling through the countryside with a poor, uneducated farmer, who noticed that the holy abbot kept his eyes cast downward. When he asked why the saint wasn't looking at the beautiful scenery, Bernard explained he wanted to avoid distractions as he prayed. The farmer then boasted that he was never distracted. Bernard expressed skepticism, but promised to give him the mule on which he was riding if the man could say the Our Father without a single distraction. The farmer agreed, and began praying confidently, "Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. . . ." Then, after pausing for a moment, he asked St. Bernard, "Does that include the saddle and the bridle too?"

It's helpful to begin praying with the request, "Lord, help me avoid all distractions now," or "Holy Spirit, keep me focused in my prayer." Also, Jesus once allegedly told a mystic that if a man and his dog took a walk in the country, the dog wouldn't constantly stay by the side of its master, but would frequently dart here and there, sniffing and exploring—but never losing sight of the man, and always rejoining him. We are like that dog when we're distracted in prayer; that's all right, Our Lord supposedly said, as long as each time we realize our minds are wandering, we gently redirect them to Him.

What is the proper method to use in prayer? The saints can give us some useful advice in this regard. To start with, St. John Vianney helps put things in perspective; he says, "The more you pray, the more you want to pray. . . . It's like a fish that starts by swimming near the surface of the water, then plunges and goes on swimming deeper and deeper. The soul plunges, is swallowed up, loses itself in the delights of conversation with God." In other words, it's beneficial and important to just go ahead and start praying, without worrying too much about *how* to pray; if we stick with it, we'll grow more comfortable being in God's presence, and prayer will become easier and more natural. This echoes the advice of St. Jane Frances de Chantal, who advises us, "The great method of prayer is to have none. If in going to prayer you can form in yourself the pure capacity for receiving the Spirit of God, that will suffice for all method."

To put it another way, simply by being open to God, prayer will occur. That's certainly reassuring; even so, most of us prefer to have at least some basic format for praying—so it's helpful to know what some of the saints actually did. Mother Teresa of Calcutta—who herself experienced many years of spiritual dryness and also an uncertainty as to whether she was even pleasing to God—once advised her sisters, “The beginning of prayer is silence—God speaking in the silence of the heart. And then start talking to God from the fullness of the heart. And He listens.” She also said, “The beginning of prayer is Scripture—we listen to God speaking. And then we begin to speak to Him again from the fullness of the heart. And He listens.” In other words, it can be very helpful to spend a few minutes quieting and relaxing ourselves, consciously placing ourselves in the Lord's presence; then we can read from the Bible for a short while, letting the passage we've chosen carry us into a prayerful spirit. When we listen to God in this way, we can be sure He in turn hears us, making our prayer powerful and effective.

Another simple but fruitful approach is described by St. Catherine Labouré, who wrote, “After I enter the chapel I place myself in the presence of God and I say to Him, ‘Lord, here I am; give me whatever You wish.’ If He gives me something [meaning a consolation, an insight, or an experience or awareness of His presence], then I am happy and I thank Him. If He does not give me anything, then I thank Him nonetheless, knowing, as I do, that I deserve nothing. Then I begin to tell Him of all that concerns me, my joys, my thoughts, my distress—and finally, I listen to Him.”

More contemporary Christians have suggested other formats. For instance, one author (P. H. Raynis) suggests using a prayer calendar, noting particular people and intentions you wish to remember to pray for; pray about troubling events reported by the news media; adopt a particular public figure to pray for; and join—or perhaps even organize—a prayer group. A nurse explained how each of her fingers reminded her of someone to pray for: “Her thumb was the nearest to her, and it reminded her to pray for those who were closest to her. The second finger was used for pointing, and it stood for all her teachers in school and in the hospital [who pointed out the right path for her to travel]. The third finger was the tallest, and it stood for the leaders in every sphere of life. The fourth finger was the weakest, as every pianist knows, and it stood for those who were in trouble and pain. The little finger was smallest and the least important, and for the nurse it stood for herself.” Still another Christian—a busy, overworked servant girl—would retire to her room every evening with that morning's newspaper. Reading the birth notices, she would pray for the newborn babies and their families; reading the marriage notices, she would pray for God's blessing upon all those newly-weds; reading the obituaries, she would pray for God's mercy upon those who died, and His consolation for those who mourned them.

There is never any lack of intentions for which to pray. Interceding for other people and for ourselves, however, is just one of the purposes of prayer; we can and should frequently pray in order to thank God, praise Him, and ask His forgiveness of our sins. In addition to the suggestions already given, some specific methods of prayer include meditation and contemplation and conversation; formal prayers; and various Catholic devotions. Meditation is the means by which we discover and explore something with

our minds and hearts. It's similar to exploring a diamond: we turn it over and over, studying its shape, transparency, and beauty. When we do this in prayer, we're doing so with the idea of God. Psalm 139 is an example of meditation, with the first six verses exploring God's knowledge, the next six verses His presence, and the third set of six verses His providence or care for us.

Contemplation means appreciating and enjoying an idea. Instead of just examining it, we feast on its loveliness. In prayer, this doesn't mean sitting passively or daydreaming; contemplation here refers to actively focusing our minds attentively and lovingly upon God. The first three verses of Psalm 119 are an example of contemplation. Conversation is how we express our thoughts to God; we speak to Him from our hearts, and we also listen to Him, in case He is speaking to us in the silence. An example of this kind of prayerful conversation is found in Psalm 104.

Scripture is very useful in praying, and it can be especially helpful to use the Mass readings assigned by the Church to each day of the liturgical year. If you don't have a Lectionary or book of Mass readings handy, you can go on-line to [www.universalis.com](http://www.universalis.com). This site also contains each day's prayers for the Liturgy of the Hours, the formal cycle of Scripture readings, psalms, prayers, and reflections used every day by the Church's priests and religious—though there's nothing to keep lay persons from using this resource as well. In addition, there are formal prayers, including the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, and numerous others available in prayer booklets; ritual prayers, such as the Grace Before Meals; the Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet (both of them being very powerful forms of prayer that have resulted in numerous conversions and miracles); Eucharistic Adoration; praying in tongues, and other forms of charismatic prayer; and—above all—the Mass itself, in which, even as we together worship God as a community, there are opportunities for personal and silent prayer. We can choose any or all of these approaches; the important thing is that we *do* try to pray regularly—no matter how imperfectly or uncertainly—for only in this way will we genuinely come closer to God.

I will leave the final word on prayer to the saintly 17th century French archbishop and spiritual guide François Fénelon, who wrote:

Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one's heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you to conquer them; talk to Him of your temptations, that he may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good, your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell Him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself and others. If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, [and] troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. . . . People who have no secrets from each other never want for subject of conversation. . . . Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God.



The Lord invites all of us, without exception, to use prayer as our means of growing in holiness by coming to a deeper personal knowledge and love of Him—and as long as we try to do so honestly and humbly, our efforts will never be in vain.

## PRAYING POWERFULLY AND SIMPLY

### **Meditation, Contemplation, and Conversation** (Mark Link, S. J.)

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*Contemplation* means appreciating and enjoying an idea. Instead of just examining it, we feast on its loveliness. In prayer, this doesn't mean sitting passively or day-dreaming; contemplation here means focusing our minds attentively and lovingly upon God. An example of contemplation is the first three verses of Psalm 119.

*Conversation* is how we express our thoughts to God; we speak to Him from our hearts, and we also listen to Him, in case He is speaking to us in the silence. Psalm 104:1-24 is an example of conversation.

### **A Confederate Soldier's Prayer**

I asked for health that I might do great things;  
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.  
I asked God for strength that I might achieve;  
I was made weak that I might learn to obey.  
I asked for riches that I might be happy;  
I was given poverty that I might be wise.  
I asked for power and the praise of men;  
I was given weakness to sense my need for God.  
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;  
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.  
I got nothing I asked for but everything I hoped for.  
In spite of myself, my prayers were answered;  
I am among all men most richly blessed.

### **Daily Mass Readings**

The Scripture readings assigned to each day can be found at [www.universalis.com](http://www.universalis.com).

### **Liturgy of the Hours**

The Church's *Liturgy of the Hours* consists of the Scripture passages, Psalms, prayers, and meditations assigned to each day of the liturgical year (on a repeating four-week cycle); they are given in a four-volume set commonly known as the Breviary. All priests and religious are required to pray the *Liturgy of the Hours* each day; laypersons may also pray them if they wish to do so. The prayers and readings for each day of the Breviary cycle can be found at [www.universalis.com](http://www.universalis.com).

### **God's Answer**

If the request is wrong, God says *No*.

If the timing is wrong, God says *Slow*.

If you are wrong, God says *Grow*.

But if the request is right, the timing is right, and you are right, God says *Go*.

-- Pastor Bill Hybels

### **Important Scripture Passages on Prayer**

*Exodus 33:11-12* - Moses experienced prayer as a very intimate relationship with God; while we shouldn't expect to see God face-to-face, it is possible that prayer will also become an intimate experience for us.

*Jeremiah 29:12-15* - Instead of permanently hiding from us, God wants us to discover Him, and prayer is an important part of this process.

*Matthew 6:5-13* - Jesus tells us not to multiply empty words in praying, nor to pray so as to attract the attention of others. He gives us the Our Father as a model of what prayer should be.

*John 14:23* - God wants to come into our lives—and prayer is the way in which we invite Him to do so.

*Romans 8:26-27* - What matters when we pray isn't the words we use, but our sincerity—for if we are truly open, the Holy Spirit will help us pray in a way that's pleasing to God the Father.

*Ephesians 6:18-20* - We should pray for spiritual growth and commitment—both for ourselves and for others.

## **The Saints on Prayer**

*St. Augustine:* If you want to “pray without ceasing” [1 Thessalonians 5:17], never cease to long for God. The continuation of your longing is the continuation of your prayer. . . .

*St. Philip Neri:* It is an old custom of the saints of God to have some little prayers ready and to be frequently darting them up to Heaven during the day, lifting their minds to God out of the mire of this world. He who adopts this plan will obtain great fruits with little pains.

*St. Jane Frances de Chantal:* Follow your own way of speaking to Our Lord sincerely, lovingly, confidently, and simply, as your heart dictates.

*St. Bernardine of Siena:* It is however to be noted that four things are required if a person is to obtain what he requests through the power of the Holy Name [of Jesus]. First that he ask for himself; second, that whatever he asks be necessary for salvation; third, that he asks in a pious manner; and fourth, that he ask with perseverance—and all these things concurrently. If he asks in this manner, he will always be granted his request.

*St. Claude de la Colombière:* We always have need of God, therefore we must always pray. The more we pray, the more we please Him and the more we obtain.

*St. Thomas Aquinas:* The Lord’s Prayer [the Our Father] is the best of all prayers. All prayer requires five excellent qualities, which are found here. A prayer should be confident, ordered, suitable, devout, and humble.

*Pope John XXIII:* Praying is the rising of the mind to God. We must always remember this. The actual words matter less.

*St. Josemaría Escrivá:* Prayer is the most powerful weapon a Christian has. Prayer makes us effective. Prayer makes us happy. Prayer gives us all the strength we need to fulfill God’s commands.

*St. Teresa of Avila:* All that should be sought for in the exercise of prayer is conformity of our will and the Divine Will, in which consists the highest perfection.

*St. Augustine:* We must understand, then, that even though God doesn’t always give us what we want, He gives us what we need for our salvation.

## **Thoughts on Prayer**

*Ralph Waldo Emerson:* Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view.

*R. A. Torrey:* Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God’s infinite grace and power. All that God is, and all that God has, is at the disposal of prayer.

*John Bunyan:* It is better to have a heart without words than words without heart.

*John Masefield:* God warms His heart at man’s heart when he prays.

*Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel:* Prayer is not a stratagem for occasional use, a refuge to resort to now and then. It is rather like an established residence for the innermost self. All things have a home; the bird has a nest, the fox has a hole, the bee has a hive. A soul without prayer is a soul without a home. . . . To pray is to open a door where both God and the soul may enter.

## **Archbishop François Fénelon’s Advice on Prayer**

Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one’s heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you to conquer them; talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good, your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell Him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself and others.

If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject. It is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want for subject of conversation. They do not weigh their words, for there is nothing to be held back; neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of their heart, without consideration they say just what they think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God.