

# The Art of Prayer

by Ingrid Lindberg

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer as a means of communication with God, and provides practical tips on how to master the art of prayer.*

**Duration:** 48:41

**Scripture:** John 6:37

**Topics:** "Prayer Life", "Communion With God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of prayer and its importance in our lives. They emphasize the idea that prayer is like entering a house, where we come in to receive from God and go out to serve others. The speaker shares personal experiences and encourages the audience to give thanks to God in everything. They also mention different types of prayer, including private prayer, corporate prayer, and flash prayers. Overall, the sermon highlights the significance of prayer as a means of communion with God, a source of strength and joy, and a pathway to victorious living.

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## Transcript

From the earliest times, God has called people to pray. We know in the Bible, Abraham, man of prayer, Moses, David, other great leaders in the church, but also ordinary people. We think of Samuel's mother praying in the temple and so on.

There has always been a need for prayer. If we ask what is prayer, many short definitions have been given, and we will look at these four that I have put down here, and then perhaps you would like to give me some other definitions which have helped you. The first one, somebody read it, the heart's communion with God.

In one of the psalms it says, to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. In another psalm, I will listen to what the Lord will say to me. The heart's communion with God.

Another definition? Christ, gold and tea. Gold and tea that opens heaven. Wonderful, isn't it? And the third one, I like very much.

Prayer is the pathway to joy and strength for creative and victorious living. I think that little phrase says so much, doesn't it? And the last one that I've written here, prayer is the gateway to spiritual power. Has anybody got something that you would like to add there? A good definition? What do you yourself feel that

prayer is? Anyone? There are many, many songs in our songbook, and here one is quoted.

Prayer is the heart's sincere desire, yes, our longing for God and our communion with God. Simply to talk to Jesus, yes. The necessity for prayer stems from our own absolute helplessness.

The one who feels, I can do this, or I've got strength, this I can manage, he doesn't need to pray, does he? But when we feel I cannot accomplish anything on my own, we lift our heart in prayer to God, asking for his help, or his guidance, his presence, whatever it is. When we know that we are helpless, then we pray. As I said before, there is nothing that can substitute prayer in our lives either.

But mastering the art of prayer, while it is like every other art, it takes time and it takes practice in order to learn it. You know, if you're going to learn to play the piano, you've got to practice again and again and again, haven't you? If you want to learn any other skill, whatever it is, it takes time and perseverance in order to advance. And so it is the same with prayer.

We need to give time and we need to develop the art of prayer in order to come nearer to God. And the amount of time that we give to it, or if I say it in another way, the way in which we commune and relate to God, that will be the true measure of our conception of the importance of prayer. So it requires both perseverance but also discipline.

I've been amazed that prayer doesn't come easier to me now than when I was young. I still have to discipline myself into prayer. Because so many people depend on their feelings and they say, oh, I don't feel like praying, you know, and I must wait until I feel like it, until it comes spontaneously.

And of course that's very wrong, isn't it? We have just got to discipline ourselves into finding time for prayer. And particularly, as we said before, there are so many distractions that can come to us, demands made on our time, and we find it difficult to discipline ourselves. Anybody here who agrees with me? Yes.

Somebody said yesterday, Satan uses the telephone as one of the greatest distractions to our prayer life. And so many other thoughts crowding in, and so many things that need our attention, strangely enough, just when we want to be quiet and pray. But we must remember that God is never unwilling to listen to us, but he's waiting for us to come.

There is a wonderful verse given in Ephesians chapter 3 about Christ. He is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or conceive. Let us look for a moment at Jesus Christ, our great teacher.

Two things that we learn by prayer from him. First, by looking at his own prayer life. And then, by listening to the words in the Gospels where Jesus speaks to us about prayer.

I've written down a few different occasions from the Gospels where Jesus is speaking about prayer, or about his own prayer. We are not going to read any of these quotations. We haven't got time for that here in the seminar.

But when you get home sometime in the future when you look back at this again, then you can take each one of these points for your own study. For instance, Jesus taught his disciples to pray. They came and said, Lord, teach us to pray.

And the wonderful prayer that our Lord taught us as our special prayer, we must never forget that. We must never neglect the Lord's prayer because that in itself teaches us everything that we need to know

about prayer. And in his own teaching, Jesus stressed the need for perseverance in prayer.

And he encouraged his disciples to pray with the promise of answered prayers. And he taught them to pray in Jesus' name. And that is a very, very important thing to remember, to pray in Jesus' name.

I'm not going to dwell more on that today. Jesus prayed for his disciples and he prayed for us. He prayed for himself in that very dark hour in Gethsemane when he was in agony.

And he prayed on the cross, both for himself and for his enemies, crying out his needs to God. And we too must pray and we must do as the disciples. We say, Lord, teach us to pray.

However long we have walked with Jesus, we need to say that or ask that from Jesus again and again, teach me how to pray. And I think many of us do that or have done it many, many times. When we feel things are hard for us, when we don't know how to present our petitions to God, we say, Oh Lord, teach me how I should pray now.

Help me in my prayer life. Because we want to learn more. There are so many, many riches that God wants to give to us.

So many new truths about the possibilities in our prayer life that God wants to show to us. And he wants to draw us nearer to himself. Now we will go over to the second page.

And this we are going to spend quite some time on. You will find here written down five main points about prayer. Different kinds of prayer.

And the most important one is, number one, about our private prayers. Then about corporate prayers, meetings, etc. Group prayers, or as we call it these days, prayer cells.

Then what I call slash prayers. And then that exhortation to pray continually. But we start at the top again about private prayers.

A disciplined daily prayer pattern must be a priority for every Christian. So many of us, and I am very guilty in this respect myself, so many of us do not keep a proper disciplined daily prayer life. But when we do it, what riches we gain, what quietness and strength comes into our lives when we do it.

And I hope that we will all strive to have a disciplined daily private prayer life. It is good to pray with others. And of course in the home we have family prayers, if we live in a family.

And that is important. But I feel even family prayers are not enough. But each one of us, we are individuals, and we need to be alone with Jesus Christ for ourselves.

Have time to listen to him personally. Why we should have our private prayer time is because Jesus has told us to do so. Matthew 6 verse 5, shall we read it together everybody? Jesus said, when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is in secret will reward you.

I wonder what Jesus meant really when he said, go into a room by yourself and shut your door. Surely Jesus who lived in Palestine 2,000 years ago, surely he knew how small the houses were in Palestine. If I am correct, I believe they had just one room, didn't they? Where everybody lived.

What did Jesus himself do I wonder? Why did he say, go into your room and shut your door, and be alone there? Well, I think, you may have different ideas, different thoughts of this, but I think this is really a figure of speech, an illustration, which will tell us of our need to withdraw from the world and be alone with God. And that we can do in many different places. Some of us perhaps live today, we are able to close a door behind us and be alone for a little while at least.

In most homes we can do that, to find a place where we can be alone. But in Jesus' time and since then there are many who perhaps, figuratively speaking, have had to do what the busy housewife did. With all the little children around her and the noise of the family, she simply threw her apron over her face and was quiet and prayed.

She shut her door. In other words, shut out all thoughts. And so it is the same with you and me.

The room by ourselves can be a room in the house of course, but it can also be for some people, some young people perhaps, sitting on the bus on the way to work, and they're completely shutting out the world around and being alone with Christ. To go for a prayer walk, have you done that? I often love to do that on a Saturday morning. I live out in a suburb on my own and I go alone down by the lake, Finland, beautiful, through the pine forest and down to a little lake.

And I walk and I talk with Jesus. And often I find great strength there. Whatever method we use, it's all right.

I like to, usually when I pray, I like to sit by my table. I have a beautiful view with a big window and trees and the forest right on the other side. And there I find great inspiration of reading the Bible.

I often write down my prayer thoughts as I sit there quietly and I look out on God's nature at the same time. Other times in my life I'm driven to my knees every time I want to pray in order to find quietness and discipline in that way. Well, please, I'm not a role model in any way, but I'm just sharing my own experience.

Perhaps somebody else here would like to say, what is it, what does it mean to you this, go into a room by yourself and shut the door? Did you hear that? Just to start with absolute quietness and shutting out all other thoughts, deliberately shutting out everything else. Difficult. I'm coming back a little bit to the same thought in a moment.

Well, the mature Christian sees the need to advance in prayer and that's why our brother here said this is something he started with recently really and found a great help of finding God. And so we find different ways of gaining a quietness. But I think we feel this need of advancing in our prayer life, past the way we prayed perhaps in our early stages of our Christian life, just petitions to God, give me this, bless me, do this, give me, and so on, into more of real communion with God himself.

In order to help us, I have written down something here that has helped me for many years. The idea here of the house of prayer, I have taken the inspiration to it from Leslie Webberhead's book, A Private House of Prayer. Many, many years ago, many years ago, I was given that book as a birthday present by Mrs. Commissioner Cottrell.

And I used it then and it just changed my whole prayer life. I used it for a year or two, I put it away for a few years, then I pick it up again for a time, put it away, and this last year I've brought it out again and find great help. But whatever book we use or message we use, doesn't matter.

But this has helped me because I liken the prayer, the private prayer, remember this is what it is, our private prayer life, to a house. Some do it by certain lessons of the ingredients in our prayer time, but I use the house here. The entrance to the house is down here, the door is open, you come into a vestibule and then round it there are six rooms.

And we can look at these. Remember, we come in to receive, into the house of prayer, we go out to serve. Just like we in our own homes come in to find food and rest and fellowship and joy in order to go out to our work, so it is with the house of prayer.

The Bible birth that I've written here at the entrance has helped me very much. Shall we read it together? Anyone who comes to me I will never turn away. You know, for many years I looked on that verse just as a verse in a salvation meeting, a verse for sinners who needed to come and get saved.

But I found it's a wonderful promise for myself. He will never turn me away when I come. This vestibule where we first come in is the place where we say to ourselves, I am in the presence of God.

There we quieten our mind. Like a brother here said, I like to think of it coming in and just breathing in the presence of God to quieten my mind. I think in our Salvation Army meetings there is great psychology in this that we sing a prayer chorus before we start praying.

You know, the prayer chorus brings us into God's presence, doesn't it? Helps us to focus our mind on Him. And here we come in and we say, here, I'm now in God's presence. And we are still for just a moment.

Either with no thoughts at all, just shutting out everything, or breathing in the Spirit of God, being still. We will go through the rooms in this direction. I will say from the beginning, I do not mean at all that every time we have our private prayer, all of these rooms must be entered, so to speak.

Sometimes, if we've got a long time to pray, we may go through them all. But we may go into a few rooms in the morning, a few other rooms at night, a few other rooms when we have an urgent need. But for a Christian, in the private prayer life, we should, during the day at some time, have been into these different rooms.

The first one I call adoration and thanksgiving. It is important when we come to God that we start off by acknowledging His greatness. Lord, You are great.

You are almighty. You are my Father, my fortress. You are my helper.

I praise You, I thank You, God, for everything that You mean to me. During that time of adoration and thanksgiving, I find great help of reading from the Psalms, particularly the last Psalm, say from Psalm 134 up to 160, where there are many Psalms of praise. I don't find words of my own.

The Bible verses help me there. Thanksgiving in prayer is very important. The Bible says again and again that there is strength in thanking and praising God.

Anybody who wants to comment on that first room, do you agree with me that there is this need? For adoration and thanksgiving? We go into the second room then, that we call confession and forgiveness. Also there are many Psalms in the Bible which help us in this respect. There is a little printing arrow.

Psalm 32, for instance, speaks much about it, and Psalm 51, so there shouldn't be the colon, but two different Psalms. You know, in Psalm 32, there are those lovely words, I will acknowledge my sin, and I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and You forgave the guilt of my sin. And Psalm 51, we all know, You created me a clean heart, etc.

For me personally, it's the room perhaps more for the evening. The day is over and we look back on what has happened during the day. We look at our own personal shortcomings, our irritability, our selfishness in certain situations, our unwillingness to understand other people's views perhaps, our sense of omission during the day, and therefore it's good to finish the day often with the confession of our shortcomings.

But when we have confessed our sins and our shortcomings, it is very important also that we receive God's forgiveness. And of course, the Bible says, if you confess your sins, He is able to forgive you your sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Oh, how I love that verse, and I read it very, very often to myself.

And you know, there is also great psychology in this, finishing the day with everything well, with God and with other people. Clean heart. It gives us rest to sleep, doesn't it? But we must also remember that when God forgives, He also forgets.

And we must also forget. I love the chorus, Jesus saves me now. Yes, Jesus saves me all the time.

And Jesus saves me now. Often apply that to myself. Hallelujah, He saves me, daily.

And I am able to live in that forgiveness from God every day. The next room, which perhaps we would want to spend a little longer time on discussing here, that is where we then come with our petitions to God. And I have said they are sincere petitions.

And we have many, many sincere petitions that we need to bring before the Lord. He knows us. He understands our inmost needs.

But He also wants us to express our needs to Him. And perhaps instead of just saying, Lord, give me, give me, we can say, Lord, make me. So that our prayers there, our petitions, concern the whole of us.

I believe God is interested in our physical needs, our bodily needs, for strength at times of illness. And here there are the days many have testified of beautiful answers to prayer when it comes to their physical needs of healing, of daily strength from the Lord. And the wonderful thing is that when we say, Lord, give me of your healing and of your strength, He answers it sometimes by just giving it to us physically.

But more than anything else, He answers our inward needs, our soul's needs for strength. There are also our mental needs, our whys, our problems, our anxieties for our family, for ourselves, for our future perhaps. There are so many things that we come to God with again and again, small things or big things.

But He says, come with these to me in prayer. And then there are our spiritual needs that we also come to Him with. Lord, make me more like yourself.

Lord, let me grow in holiness and in likeness to Jesus Christ. Some people, when it comes to their own development of the spiritual life, they say, well, this is my personality, this is my temperament, and people have just got to put up with me as I am. If they like it or not.

But I remember already when I was in the training college, one of our officers often said, what you are not by nature, you can become by God's grace. And we can grow in grace. But of course, that requires prayers and a sincere seeking after it.

I think it is very important also that when we have brought our petitions to God, that we then also receive from Him what He wants to give to us. So often we just pray and lay before God what we need, but do we then also in faith stretch out our hands and say, I believe I have received it now. This part, of course, more than any other part, petitions and intercession, which is linked with the petitions, this requires faith on our part.

It is not enough just to pray, do this, give me that, but to receive it. How do you act when you want to receive in faith from God? Some people do it by thanksgiving. After they have prayed for it, they say, as the Bible exhorts us to do, Lord, I thank you because you have heard my prayer.

It is not always easy to do it. But in thanking God and in faith, claiming what He gives us, we will receive. In sharing this with petitions and answers to prayers, when you pray for your own needs and God has answered you, and God gave you strength to do something which you would normally not be able to do, to do the meeting because the captain couldn't come.

It's wonderful how God comes to our aid when we lay our needs before Him, doesn't He? I wonder what your views are on this, in everything give thanks to God. I think I just want to share a personal experience with you. What I myself have learned about this, of thanking God also.

Ten years ago, I got my appointment as the officer commanding of the Philippines. I had been in Zimbabwe earlier and I was moving over to a new continent into an entirely new work of responsibility which I've never had before and I was very worried. But, previous to that, for a few years I've had great pain in my neck.

And I've been to a chiropractor who had given me the wrong treatment and injured a nerve here in my throat. It didn't bother me all the time, but often when I got tired or I was under stress, I got terrible pain here which really hindered me, I felt, in my work. At least it hindered me more psychologically, you know, in doing what I should.

I can never remember that I had asked God to take this away from me. But now, two days before I was going to the Philippines, and I was busy packing and getting ready at home, I was in Stockholm at my home then, this bothered me terribly. And I said to God, Lord, I feel I cannot go into this new job and the great responsibility there unless you free me from this physical problem so that I feel I'm free and I can do my work well.

And I knelt down by my bedside and in faith I claimed God's healing of that nerve in my throat, which was painning me all the time. When I had prayed I said, Lord, in the name of Jesus Christ I now receive that healing and I believe I've got it. And thank you, Lord, you have heard my prayer.

I went to bed, slept well, woke up the next morning. The pain was there in the same way. But I said, well, it's only up here in my mind because I've had it for three or four years.

So why should I worry? God has healed me of it. It is not there, but it's only I who am thinking because I'm conditioned to think about it so often. And right through the day I just went on thanking God.

The thirst became the same way, pained me the whole day. But I just kept on thanking God because He had heard my prayers and I believed He had healed me. Friday morning I stepped on the airplane on my way to Manila and the pain was gone.

And it didn't come back. For about a year I never felt a thing of it, had forgotten it, until one day in the busy traffic of Manila, I sat driving to THQ, hot, terrible traffic, and suddenly that feeling came creeping on me again. The same pain came back.

And I said, Satan, you are just tempting me now. In Jesus' name, I have been healed. It's not there.

And the pain left me immediately. Many times since then I can say it has come back. If I'm tired, under stress, every time I just put my hand here.

Nobody may know why I do it. And I said, thank you, God, it's not there. And every time it disappears immediately.

And it never bothers me. That was God's way of helping me, I think, to teach me thanksgiving and to teach me to believe more that when I pray, God will do it. Now I know, like all of us here, there are so many other things that come in our way, so many sicknesses, other things, where we feel, why doesn't God answer? And we are going to talk about that later on.

God knows to us. But when He does help us, it is because He wants to teach us something. And even when His answer is no at times, there is still something He's teaching us because His promise is through St. Paul, my grace is sufficient for you.

My strength is made perfect in your weakness. That is, of receiving from God. If we pray for physical strength and we don't get it, God gives us spiritual strength.

If we pray for companionship when we feel lonely or left out, He gives us inner spiritual fellowship with Himself. When we have sorrow and problems, He gives us inner joy. I believe God always answers our prayers, not in the way that we expect, but in a spiritual way, He comes and gives us all the support that we need.

We'll go to the next room that I've called here, Listening to the Spirit. It's a very difficult room to stay in. We don't easily go there because it means being quiet to hear what God will say.

Psalms 85 verse 8 says, I will listen to what the Lord will say. Unfortunately, in our prayers we come with our petitions and when we have said them, we finish and we go away instead of being quiet and listen to what God will say. I read recently where somebody said that don't worry too much about all the thoughts that come crowding in when you want to listen to God because sometimes He has something to say to you.

You know, the thought of, oh dear, that person, I should telephone her today, I mustn't forget it. Maybe it is the Lord reminding us that we should bring her to Him in prayer or, oh, I should go and visit such and such a person. It can be God reminding us of it when we are just quiet.

But also to listen to new things, unpleasant things about ourselves. God often has to tell me about things in my own nature which He doesn't like. And He comes and He reminds us again and again and He says, you haven't progressed there.

Come on, do something about it. Work hard at it and take, receive my help. Anybody who wants to share something about listening to God and what He has said to you.

You know, this of being God's servant and doing His errands for Him. Isn't it wonderful how He leads us? Yes. Yes, I must agree with you that often when I want to listen other voices come or often I say, Lord, why don't you speak now? Let me hear what you have to say.

And He's just silent. Doesn't say anything. Some people talk about hearing voices clearly or finding absolutely clear direction.

Times we do it. But perhaps God just wants us to learn to be still. But when we come into that room we must say like Samuel, speak Lord.

Your servant is listening. But perhaps our problem is that we are afraid of listening. Aren't we? I heard a friend of mine telling once he was away on a business trip and the wife was alone with a little daughter at home and in the middle of the night mummy felt very sick and she wanted some water to drink.

She couldn't get up, you know, herself. So she called her nine-year-old daughter and said, Anna, Anna. Because she wanted to get some water.

But Anna didn't answer. So in the end mother had to cope on her own. In the morning mum said to little Anna, Anna, didn't you hear that I called you in the night? I needed your help.

Oh mum, was that you calling? I thought it was God who called me and I got scared. So I didn't listen. So I didn't answer.

I didn't answer. She had heard in the Sunday school about Samuel. But you know that has taught me very much.

I thought it was you Lord and I got scared. Are we not afraid of what He will say? And is that not why we find difficulty sometimes? Because we know if God speaks we must obey. That room of going in and listening to God I find often if I've got a great problem I just need to withdraw and kneel down and pour out that for God and then find what He has to say.

Especially for all our big decisions in life how we need to listen. The next part about intercession. Here we are in a very special way sharing Christ's burden for the world.

Intercession comes to those who have matured as Christians and God wants us to help Him in saving the world. This is a privilege of being co-worker with God but it is also a very, very great responsibility. But it is our duty.

He lays on our hearts the burdens of others. Christ Himself prayed for others. Prayed for His disciples.

He prayed for us. But now, in your intercession do you use any special method? Any here who are using a prayer list? How many use prayer lists? All of us. Most of us do.

Well, there again, we do. I do it. I can't.

I'm asked of it. I don't do it regularly. Because in so many things I change my prayer patterns.

But perhaps a very common pattern is that we have the days of the week and we pray for different things each day. Different prayer subjects. We change our subject from time to time, of course.

The lovely thing with a prayer list is that you can write in afterwards answered prayer and the date. Here we have seen it. And other subjects are on a list for years and years.

And to share with others like that in praying for each other it's a tremendous help, isn't it? And a joy. At our territorial headquarters we receive from time to time letters. You know, territories or territorial headquarters have one day a week when you have a longer prayer time than other days.

At our headquarters we have five minutes every morning but on Wednesdays we have half an hour. And often we get letters especially from the missionary countries. The Philippines, Hong Kong, Korea and so on.

And they say, this week we are praying for your territory. Isn't it wonderful? And it's such a joy to know that we are in a prayer fellowship with the whole world. At our headquarters also we take one core or one institution at a time that we pray for.

But we write to them a few weeks ahead and we say, we are going to pray for you such and such a day next month. Will you please send in your prayer requests? What are your special needs right now? And so we get this letter back. Please pray for that and that and that in our core or in our institution.

Because I think it's easier if we can be specific also in what we are praying about. If we know the needs then we can pray in a better way. But to learn to pray for others is important.

And I think it is... You know what I feel myself I have failed so often is when I've met the person and I've said, I promise I will pray for you. And perhaps I've only prayed that today. And no more.

Instead of continuing to pray. And yet God knows our hearts, doesn't he? And our desire to be of help to each other. But I think the prayer lists help us to go out in a wider circle and not just praying for our immediate families or those whom we have that personal concern for.

But go wider and wider and wider in our prayers. Praying for our families, our immediate families, those who are not saved. That of course is very close to our hearts, isn't it? I think I dare share with you here what an officer said the other day.

She came into the seminar and she had a big plastic bag from trade with her. And then she stood up and said, when we talked about intercession, she said, in this bag I've got a new uniform for my daughter. And her young teenage daughter had been in the army and then you know, slipped away.

Left the army. Got a boyfriend who wasn't at all a Christian. That kept on for years, praying and praying for this daughter that she would come back to the Lord.

And she's living separate from her parents, I think, here in London. And the parents are somewhere else. And now at the Congress, she meets her daughter in uniform.

And the mother said, wow, are you back in uniform? And she said, well I borrowed the uniform from my landlady because I want to come in uniform. I met the Lord again and I've broken off with my bad boyfriend and I'm back with the Lord. And the mother, but it happened so recently that the mother had not been told.

So the mother said, well do you remember many years ago, some years ago, we said to you, when you come back into the army again, we will buy a new uniform for you. So this week now, the mother went and got the uniform. And I met the daughter yesterday also with her mother.

And she shared this, how many of us were praying for years and years for close relatives and we don't see any result. But God will answer. God will answer us.

Amen.

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