



Introduction Move #1: Almost Everyone Prays

Almost everyone prays. Overall, 9 in 10 Americans claim to engage in prayer, most on a daily basis. Scientists have studied prayer. Those who pray 30 minutes a day have lower blood pressure, reduced stress, and better focus. They report feeling more powerfully connected to God and experience him directly. What if we could experience more of the benefit of prayer and less “bounce-back” from the ceiling? Would you be interested?

Introduction Move #2: Jesus Gives a Better Way to Pray

As disciples, we decide to follow Jesus in Prayer. Jesus’ way of prayer will lead us into the deepest benefits of prayer. One time his disciples asked him, “Can you teach us how to pray?” (Luke 11:1). Jesus introduced us to what is now called the Lord’s Prayer. In that prayer, He introduces us to a pattern for prayer that we can use as a guide. We call these the prayer circles. Jesus wants prayer to encircle all our entire life with his peace, provision, and a sense of His presence. How do we engage prayer in the same way Jesus did? The Prayer Circles.

This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,”

Matthew 6:9

Circle #1: Listening Prayer

When we begin in prayer, Jesus tells us to start with both a sense of rest, “My Father,” and also respect, “Hallowed be your name.” Without a doubt, if respect is owed to the office of the President, how much more to our Creator, the King of the Entire Cosmos? Jesus says, “Bring respect to your prayer.” But he also says, “You can rest in prayer.” Why? The first thing Jesus reminds us of is that God is Our Father. He is our perfect Dad, so we can find perfect rest and relax in His presence because Jesus, through His life, death, and resurrection, made a way for us to know we are God’s beloved children. In the listening circle, we come with a profound sense of respect and rest, ready to listen. Most of us don’t associate prayer with listening, only talking. But, prayer isn’t just a monologue, it’s a dialogue. God speaks to us through His Word and His Spirit. Jesus said, “My sheep listen to my voice” (John 10:27). All through the Story, we see the Spirit giving very specific instructions through prayer. When we begin in prayer, we start by breathing in, through a listening type of prayer.

Ask and Listen: Father, how are you already at work in me and around me where I live, work, study, and play?

From there, Jesus proceeds with two types of breathing out prayer found within the next phrases of the Lord's prayer.

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

Circle two: Missional Prayer

"Kingdom Come" is an invitation to step back, lift our eyes, and remember Jesus has a mission in this world and nothing matters more. What does this Kingdom mission look like? In Matthew 19:28 Jesus describes it with five words, *"The renewal of all things."* Everything broken made whole. Everything shattered restored, the ultimate extreme makeover project and we are invited. Jesus said the Kingdom of God is the place on earth where heaven is breaking through. That begins in our hearts. That continues where we live, work, study, and play. It ultimately includes the whole world. If the key words in the listening circle are *respect* and *rest*, the key words in the missional circle are *surrender* and *serve*. First, we surrender to His will, His mission. In later parts of the Lord's prayer, we will see our need to surrender our own faults and also our grudges against others (Matthew 6: 12). We will need to surrender to our powerlessness and ask for His power to deliver us from temptation and demonic evil (Matthew 6:13). As we surrender all of our life, then, we also look for how we can serve His will and His mission around us. Here's a simple question to begin with...

Ask and Listen: Father, how can I join you?

That will naturally lead to the next type of breathing out prayer, the third prayer circle. Jesus teaches us to pray,

"Give us today our daily bread." Matthew 6:11

Circle #3: Practical Prayer

Every day, Jesus cares about our daily bread. He wants to know about our practical needs daily. Prayer takes us beyond merely human effort producing merely human results. Still prayer is not first about getting something; prayer is first about getting Someone. Ultimately, prayer is communing with Jesus. If we have Him, we have the Source for all we need. Asking for practical needs keeps us motivated to come back to Him daily.

Also, notice Jesus doesn't say, "Give ME today MY daily bread." It's a communal prayer, "Give US today OUR daily bread." As I get a sense of where God is at work in others, as I join him, I have the amazing opportunity to pray with and for people by name. Start with these simple questions.

Ask and Listen: Father, here are my needs, how can I trust you?

Ask and Listen: Neighbor, how can I pray for you?

Prayer Flow and Overlapping Circles

Let me ask you, if we were to survey the prayer life of the average person, including even devoted people, which one of these types of prayer do you think probably receives the most airtime? If you had to represent it by the size of the circles, how would you draw each circle?

Without a doubt, in my experience, PRACTICAL prayer is 80-100% of our prayer time. Yet, in the pattern Jesus gives us for prayer, the two other circles of prayer take priority. Listening Prayer and Missional Prayer, make up 80% or more of the pattern Jesus gave to us.

The goal is for our listening prayer to inform our missional prayer which will inform our practical prayer. There is a flow from listening to missional to practical prayer. When we get in that flow, we experience the deepest benefits of prayer.

We don't need to see these as competing that circles, but complimentary circles and eventually, as concentric circles, that completely overlap each other. That's what the Bible calls "pray(er) without ceasing," where we are communing with Jesus in a conversation that never ends. Our whole life is encircled in prayer.

What stood out to you about your prayer life?
Now, who can you share this with this week?