



If You Don't Know How to Pray. . . Pray Anyway

There is a mystique about prayer that often keeps us from praying and, in the process, denies us the full benefits of prayer.

Some of the misunderstandings about prayer involve knowing what words to say and what posture to assume in order to pray effectively. Prayer, however, can be God-honoring, faith-inspiring, meaningful, and effective when whispered by a young child kneeling at a bedside. Prayer can also dishonor God, be meaningless, devoid of faith, and ineffective when loudly proclaimed and incessantly repeated by a religious leader standing before a congregation.

Using supposedly correct wording and posture is not an issue in prayer. The poem *The Prayer of Cyrus Brown*¹ addresses these issues.

“The proper way for a man to pray,”
Said Deacon Lemuel Keyes,
“And the only proper attitude
Is down upon his knees.”

“No, I should say the way to pray,”
Said Rev. Doctor Wise,
“Is standing straight with outstretched arms
And rapt and upturned eyes.”

“Oh, no; no, no,” said Elder Slow,
“Such posture is too proud:
A man should pray with eyes fast closed
And head contritely bowed.”

“It seems to me his hands should be
Austerely clasped in front.
With both thumbs pointing toward the ground,”
Said Rev. Doctor Blunt.

“Las’ year I fell in Hodgkin’s well
Head first,” said Cyrus Brown,
“With both my heels a-stickin’ up,
My head a-pinting down;

“An’ I made a prayer right then an’ there—
Best prayer I ever said,
The prayingest prayer I ever prayed,
A-standing on my head.”

Even though the poem is humorous, it illustrates that proper posture or words are not the issue in prayer. Instead, basic aspects of God-honoring prayer are: (1) a recognized need, (2) a realization of an inability to meet that need, and (3) a

reliance on God that He is able to answer prayer and meet the need, no matter how insurmountable it seems to be. With these basic parameters in place, you can ask for God’s help in any situation of life.

Keep in mind that effective praying does not necessarily mean that you get what you pray for but, rather, that you want and expect to receive what God knows is best for you.” Since God is infinitely good, His answers are *always* the best for you. (See [God Always Answers Prayer but Not As We Think](#).)

The Bible addresses many other aspects of prayer, and you can learn and experience them as you grow in Christ. For example, biblical teaching about prayer is presented in [Do You Really Believe What You Say about Prayer?](#) and [A Prayer Pattern to Help Structure Your Life](#).

Prayer is an element of your spiritual life in which you can always grow. As a follower of Christ, you will want to do so. However, maturing in your prayer life does not depend on special phrases or physical positions that supposedly guarantee answers to prayer. Instead, remember that if you don’t know how to pray . . . pray anyway.

As a further point of encouragement to followers of Christ, reflect on this promise from God’s Word with regard to prayer.

Romans 8:26-28, Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

As a believer in Christ, even if you do not pray as you ought . . . pray anyway.

¹*The Wit and Humor of America, Volume 7*, edited by Marshall Pinckney Wilder (Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1911), Page 1398.