

# How To Pray



Lake Erie Church

January 22, 2023

## How to Ask God For Help

Good morning!

In the lobby, at the Welcome Center you will find two books that have been extremely important to me—both are written by Peter Greig, a pastor from the UK (Emmaus Road Church) and a global prayer leader of 24-7prayer.com.

- [How to Pray](#)
- [How to Hear God](#) (2<sup>nd</sup> most influential book I've ever read)

Each week we are providing you with resources to help you in your pursuit of a deeper relationship with God. Today, you will find...

- [A 31 day Bible Reading Challenge](#)
- An article by Brittany Yesudasan on [How Do I Hear God's Voice](#)
- The [sermon notes](#) for today.

If you have questions about prayer—about the resources we are providing or about any element of today's sermon—text those questions to **330.212.9656** and Pastor Bill will respond to you within 24 hours.

(Mark 9:14-29)

When they returned to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them, and some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. When the crowd saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with awe, and they ran to greet him. "What is all this arguing about?" Jesus asked. One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, "Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won't let him talk. And whenever this spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it." Jesus said to them, "You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth. "How long has this been happening?" Jesus asked the boy's father. He replied, "Since he was a little boy. The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can." "What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. "Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak," he said. "I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!" Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him.

The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up. Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, "Why couldn't we cast out that evil spirit?" Jesus replied, "This kind can be cast out only by prayer."

## **Introduction:**

When you pray about the small things in life, you get to live with greater gratitude.

We are learning there are many dimensions of prayer and some of them are deep and theological but at the heart of all prayer is asking God for H\_\_\_\_\_.

Jesus said...

(Matthew 18:19)

I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you.

(John 14:14)

Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!

(James 4:2)

you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it.

Why is "asking" so critical to our prayer life?

## **God Wants Us To Ask Because It Is R\_\_\_\_\_.**

- We've been saying for some time that God is interested in a relationship with you—not just dispensing blessings to you.

## **God Wants Us To Ask Because It Is V\_\_\_\_\_.**

- Possible reasons we are so reluctant to ask God for help...
  - Our requests seem too trivial to bother God with.
  - We're protecting ourselves from disappointment and doubt.
  - We feel like we're being selfish or greedy.
  - We assume our prayers can't affect his sovereign plan.
  - We think we can handle it ourselves.
  - We assume he is unwilling or unable to help.
- Asking is an expression of D\_\_\_\_\_.
- Asking is an expression of F\_\_\_\_\_.

(Matthew 7:11)

So if you, despite being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

**God Wants Us To Ask Because It Is I \_\_\_\_\_.**

- When we ask God for something we are inviting Him to participate in our lives—
- Have you ever handled something in your life BETTER than God could?

... What a friend we have in Jesus All our sins and griefs to bear

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!

... O what peace we often forfeit O what needless pain we bear

All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer

How Do I Hear God's Voice?

Brittany Yesudasan

Have you ever found yourself thinking, “I wish God talked to us the way He spoke to His people in the Old Testament”?

Many times, Scripture describes God speaking to His people through a voice or an angel or a dream. He even writes on a wall in one account (Daniel 5). So it’s natural to want to hear God’s voice or see a big sign that will help you feel confident in God’s direction.

We all experience confusing circumstances. Sometimes you may just want God to send you a text message to tell you what to do. Maybe you feel far from God and want Him to reach out to reassure you He’s still there. Maybe you’ve heard people say the God of the Bible is personal, but you have never interacted with God before and wonder how to begin.

He is the same God today that He was in the time of the Old Testament. He still speaks to us today. He made it possible for each of us to have a personal relationship with Him, which involves talking together every day. He communicates with us.

Many of us have just never learned how to recognize His voice, or we’ve forgotten how we did in the past.

So in a world full of noise and distraction, how does God speak to us?

## **Different Ways God Speaks in the Bible**

God speaks audibly to His people. Here are some occasions when He spoke to people in the Bible in a voice they literally heard:

- He spoke to Samuel as a child in the temple (1 Samuel 3).
- He spoke to Moses out of the burning bush and told him to free His people from Egypt (Exodus 3).
- He spoke to Elijah not through an earthquake or a great wind but with a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:11-12).

So God can and does speak with an audible voice, though that’s not often how Christians hear from God in Western cultures. Because God is the same today as He was then, we believe He still can and does speak audibly today.

Another way God speaks to His people is through miraculous events, such as signs, dreams and visions.

Signs came in many forms in biblical times, from the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14) to the disciples finding a donkey colt exactly when and where Jesus said they would (Matthew 21:2-7).

Dreams and visions are depicted from the beginning of the Bible to the end. The last book of the Bible, Revelation, tells how John, one of Jesus' closest followers, received a vision of heaven with streets of gold (Revelation 4). Dreams and visions communicate in one of two ways: with specific instructions or with symbolism to be interpreted by the Spirit as a message to people.

## **Pursuing God Is Essential to Hearing God**

God tells us very clearly in the Bible that the more we seek Him, the more we are going to experience His presence in our lives.

**“You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13, New International Version)**

**“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6, NIV)**

**“I love those who love Me, and those who seek Me find Me.” (Proverbs 8:17, NIV)**

**“The LORD looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.” (Psalm 14:2, NIV)**

God never leaves us once we invite Him into our lives, but He does respond to our desire for more of Him.

So how do you demonstrate your desire for more of God? Pursue Him somehow every day.

Reading and studying the Bible, spending time in prayer, and talking with other followers of Jesus are not just part of our to-do list. God encourages us to do these things because they help us to learn about His character and learn to recognize His voice.

He uses our knowledge of who He is and what He has done to help us respond to situations we face.

Setting aside the distractions of everyday life to focus on God is not just a physical or mental activity. It's a way of centering your heart on God and communicating that He has your complete attention. It's similar to relationships with other people. If you sit down to listen to a loved one but you check your text messages every few seconds, they will not feel you are listening to them, and you're less likely to hear everything they want to communicate.

How much more does God deserve your complete attention?

You cannot expect to hear God's voice if you do not regularly focus your attention on Him as fully as you can.

## God Speaks to Us Through the Holy Spirit

In the Old Testament, we mostly read about God speaking to people from outside of themselves. But Jesus has promised the people who believe in Him something more.

On the night Jesus was arrested before His crucifixion, He spoke to His closest friends. He knew that He was going to return to His Father in heaven soon. His friends, the disciples, had spent several years walking and talking with Jesus every day. They never had to struggle to hear His voice in that sense.

Soon, Jesus would commission His friends to take the message of what He had done to the whole world. But He would not be physically present with them. They would need His guidance every day to make decisions about where to go and what to do next.

Jesus wanted them to be confident they would have everything they needed. So He revealed to them the news that in the future, God would live within them in the person of the Holy Spirit. Yes, God would continue to be someone apart from them, but He was placing His actual presence inside each person who believed in Jesus.

Jesus said:

**“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify Me because it is from Me that He will receive what He will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from Me what He will make known to you.” (John 16:12-15, NIV)**

The presence of the Holy Spirit in your life changes everything about hearing God's voice. If you have chosen to begin a personal relationship with Jesus, His Spirit now lives within you.

So rather than wondering where God is and how to connect with Him, you can have complete confidence that He lives within you and is always ready to guide you.

If you have not yet invited Jesus into your life, find out how you can know God personally.

God speaks to you through the Bible. In it, God tells you how to live the life He has called you to live. The Bible is full of stories with lessons, stories with God speaking truth and God revealing what you need to hear to lead a life that blesses Him.

God also speaks through the internal promptings of the Holy Spirit. John 14:26 says that the Spirit teaches you and helps you remember what God has done. The Holy Spirit prompts you to act in obedience, to turn away from sinful things, and to reach out to the people around you for support.

Internal promptings can urge you to share the message of Jesus with the people in your life.

Find out more about the Holy Spirit and how you can experience more of God in your life.

God wants to make His voice known to you. He has no desire to confuse you. The combination of His Spirit within you and His living word, the Bible, in front of you is His plan for teaching you to recognize His voice.

So why do many Christians live their lives wondering exactly what God is saying or whether He is still speaking at all?

The answer may lie in understanding what distracts you from hearing God.

## **What Distracts You From Hearing God's Voice?**

Our lives are full of things and people competing for our attention. Many of them are just part of everyday life, so we do not recognize how they are coming between us and God.

Here are a few distractions that are common for people who want to hear God's voice.

### **Busyness**

Busyness is the most common distraction, which most people have to deal with. Your schedule fills and you still try to fit more in. You might hear people telling you to slow down and enjoy the important things, like family, rest, and your relationship with God. But your days start quickly, racing from one thing to the next without pausing. You fall into bed intending to read the Bible or pray, only to fall asleep exhausted.

Busyness steals your ability to slow down long enough to hear God's voice.

## **Outside Influences**

Not only do people fill their schedules but they also fill their minds. With technology at your fingertips, you may be tempted to fill every spare minute with entertainment or information. Music, TV, movies, video games, and social media all contain messages our brains have to expend energy processing. Some messages have a positive effect on us; many do not. Regardless, God's voice is competing with them for our attention.

This constant stream of messaging can be a huge distraction to hearing God's voice. Some of it we might even think is helpful. But not all voices — even voices that claim to honor the Lord — will lead you to biblical and godly perspectives. Many teachings sound very beneficial but actually reflect the world's message instead of God's message. The way to know the difference is by spending time with God and knowing what He says in the Bible.

## **Behaviors and Attitudes**

Choices can drown out God's voice. Your attitudes and habits can lead you away from Him without your realizing it.

Attitudes like jealousy, ingratitude, bitterness, cynicism or a critical nature do not reflect the message God is trying to send to us. The voice of God always says something that reflects His character. God is gracious, kind and patient, and He pursues peace and unity. The more space we give to attitudes that are opposed to God's qualities, the less we'll be willing to hear whatever He's trying to tell us.

Your behaviors can also drown out God's voice in your life. To sin is to choose not to live the way God wants you to and shows you in the Bible. The more often you choose to sin, the less willing you're going to be to hear God's voice.

Once sinful behaviors become a pattern, they start directing choices. Sins that are hidden and covered up will lead to shame, and that will make you want to hide from God.

It's possible to know when you are going against God. When you try to hide from Him you're less likely to listen for His voice.

## **Apathy**

Some behaviors keep us from hearing God's voice. But many people do not realize that doing nothing can keep us from hearing it too.

Apathy is a lack of concern for something. Apathy toward God can be just as detrimental to your relationship with Him as choosing sinful behavior because you are concerning ourselves with lesser things.

If you feel apathetic toward God, you are unlikely to pay attention to the ways that God is speaking to you. If you are not making time to pray or read the Bible, you are denying yourself an opportunity to hear Him speak to you.

## **How Do You Know You're Hearing God's Voice?**

God speaks in many ways, and He speaks often. But there are lots of voices trying to speak to us all the time. So how do you know if you're hearing God's voice? God wants you to be confident about hearing Him. So He gives you a few ways to confirm what you think you hear Him saying.

### **Scripture**

God speaks through the Bible. That's why it is often called the Word of God. The God described in the Bible is and always has been the same God that followers of Jesus worship today. His character does not change. So when God speaks, it is always consistent with what He said to people like Moses, David and Paul in the Bible.

If you think you have heard God speak to you, but it seems to be inconsistent with the character of God in the Bible, it is unlikely that what you heard came from Him. It's possible to fool yourself into hearing what you want to hear, and Jesus' followers also have a spiritual enemy, the devil, who loves to convince God's people of lies.

Your defense against this is knowing the Bible and knowing God in a way that enables you to know which voice you're hearing.

### **Affirmed by Others**

You are not meant to live the Christian life in your strength or independently. You have Christ and the Holy Spirit, and you also have a Christian community that serves as an environment for your spiritual growth. You can learn to hear God's voice by being around people who are regularly listening to him.

When trying to discern God's voice, it's a good idea to find other believers who've been walking with Christ longer than you have. Ask them if they can affirm what you sensed the Lord saying to you.

Listening to other Christians should never become a substitute for listening to God Himself. But other believers can help you confirm whether or not your thoughts are consistent with what the Bible says.

### **Persistent Message**

God is consistent, and He is persistent. He does not lose patience or give up. He communicates like that as well. He is continually speaking to us. If you believe that you are hearing God say the same thing to you over a period of time and perhaps through several of the different ways you can hear Him, be confident in your ability to recognize His voice. Test it against Scripture and affirm it with others, but God wants you to have increasing confidence that you can listen to and hear Him.

This is a learning process. If at any point you feel like you misheard God, go back to Him, admit that, and ask Him to speak again so that you can understand Him more clearly.

## **Time**

Your Christian life and your relationship with Jesus mature with time and experience. The longer you walk with Jesus, the more you will learn to hear His voice. God always speaks, but over time, you will become more confident in discerning when He's speaking and what He's saying.

## **4 Tips to Practice Hearing from God**

### **1. The “Daily Office” strategy.**

Set aside time every day to approach God. You can start with just a 10-minute chunk sometime during your day. Begin by quieting your mind and taking some deep breaths. Then focus your thoughts by reading a small portion of Scripture.

Read it slowly, and if possible review it multiple times so that it sinks in. After reading, sit silently with God. Allow Him to bring something out of whatever you have read and illuminate its meaning for you. Then make a note of whatever you think God says in a journal or notebook so you can track back later.

This may be uncomfortable at first, but the more you practice it, the easier it will be to stop your mind from wandering. Finish your time with prayer by responding to the Lord as your heart leads. You can increase the length of the time and passage of Scripture as you become accustomed to spending time with the Lord.

Find out more about how to spend time in the Bible every day.

### **2. Meet regularly with other believers in a church or Christian ministry.**

Smaller groups such as Bible studies or accountability groups will help you discuss what God is saying to each of you and how to act on it. They also give people the opportunity to pray for one another.

### **3. Spiritual breathing.**

Because sin and distractions can crowd out God's voice in our lives, it's vital to regularly ask God to show you anything that's keeping you from Him. You must ask Him for His forgiveness and the strength to stop doing those things. You can protect yourself from sin creeping into your life unnoticed by practicing spiritual breathing.

Physically, you breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide. In your spiritual life, you can "breathe out" sinful thoughts or behaviors by confessing them to God, and you can ask Him to fill you afresh with His Holy Spirit, "breathing in" the assurance of the Holy Spirit like fresh oxygen.

Find out more about spiritual breathing and how you can experience the Spirit-filled life.

### **4. Pursue God.**

God wants your relationship with him to deepen over time. The more you approach Him, the more you will get to know Him, trust Him and recognize His voice.

Trusting God is ultimately more about knowing who He is and what He is like than understanding exactly what He is doing in your life at a given point. God is in control, which means you have to let Him be in control and not demand that He tells you everything He's going to do in your life before you choose to follow Him.

Knowing this becomes especially important if you go through a season of life when God seems to be silent.

God wants you to know Him. He wants you to hear what He's saying to you so you can live according to the perfect plan He has for your life. You will never understand everything God is doing or saying, but you can learn to trust Him in all circumstances by knowing that He is always trustworthy.

Because of that, you can begin to live your life in a way that enables you to hear Him. Start from the presumption that He loves you and wants to communicate with you. Thank Him for choosing to make Himself known to you. Invite Him to remove distractions and teach you how to hear His voice. And then wait patiently for Him to speak.

"Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD" (Psalm 40:4, NIV).