

## Sermon      Introduction to Prayer Part 4: Forms of Prayer

Imagine a school graduation ceremony with no program – no band, speakers, presentation of class, walk, closing, nada. How about a wedding where the bride and groom come up front, the preacher says to the groom, “Do you wanna marry Her?” Then asks the bride the same, as concludes, “Ok you’re married. Ta da!” It is possible to be very casual with those otherwise important ceremonies. However, we have an innate need to have form and structure in the important areas of our life. Prayer is the same way – the proof is the Lord’s Prayer. However, there is a bit more leeway in our prayer life for the need of form and structure, so today I hope to present a range of prayer forms from the simplest to the most complex.

First up is what we might call the Formless Prayer. This is reminiscent of the opening verses of Genesis, where in the beginning it says the earth was, “formless and void.” Sometimes our prayers are like this. However, as in the beginning the Spirit of God hovered over the formless earth, he is also present in our prayers we offer without form or even words:

***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. Romans 8:26***

Sometimes these formless prayers are all we have to offer. There is a time for those, but we do not want to get stuck in that mode of prayer or feel these prayers are somehow more spiritual than other prayers. It is good to move up to something with words.

The next type is simple Conversational Prayers. We hear many of these in the bible. Abraham dickered with God when he tried to prevent the destruction of the city where his nephew and family were living. He simply asked God if he would save the city if God found 50 righteous people there. Then he bargained God down to 45, then 30 - all the way down to 10. Abraham was having a conversation with God. One time a father came to Jesus and offered a simple, conversational prayer to the Lord:

***While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.” Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples. Matthew 9:18-19***

Even our Lord, hanging upon the cross, offered a simply spoken prayer:

***Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. Luke 23:46***

Conversational prayers are probably the most personal and deeply felt prayers we can offer. Our own thoughts and feelings drive these prayers, so they are the most personal and intimate words we have with the Lord. With these prayers we are “in the moment” and fully engaged in conversation with God. Therefore, these are the kinds of prayers many people prefer and consider to be the best because they are our own prayers and expression what is most important to us.

Another form of prayer is Memorized Prayers. These prayers can be helpful because sometimes we don’t know what to say or don’t want to have to make up our own prayers on the spot. The common table prayer for us Lutherans, “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest and let thy gifts to us be blessed” is an example of a memorized prayer. Perhaps you memorized, “Bless us O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from thy bounty, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.” Or maybe, “Now I lay

me down to sleep ...” Luther’s morning and evening prayers were written for children to learn and use all their lives. There are many prayers meant for memorization. Many hymn stanzas double as wonderful prayers which lend themselves to memorization such as,

***“Grant peace, we pray, in mercy, Lord; Peace in our time, O send us! For there is none on earth but you, none other to defend us.” LSB 777***

That hymn was written in the 6th century, yet how appropriate it is for today and every age! The most famous of all is no doubt the Lord’s Prayer. Spoken from the lips of our good Lord himself, it is the chief memorized prayer and all other prayers are found to flow from it. Memorized prayers – even the Lord’s Prayer – are sometimes criticized because they are not seen as prayers that “flow from the heart.” It is possible to say a prayer we know by heart without really thinking about what we are saying. However, is the problem with the prayer or is it with the person saying the prayer? The blame falls on the one saying the prayer and who does not engage themselves in the words they are speaking. Consequently, we keep memorized prayers in the list of useful prayer forms.

The final form of prayer to cover is what I call structured prayers. One of these forms is the Litany. These prayers are often built around short memorized prayers such as the leper’s call to Jesus, “Lord, have mercy!” These prayers are sometimes titled KYRIE in our worship, as Kyrie is the Greek word for Lord. Sometimes the phrase is expanded to “Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.” This memorized prayer is joined with specific requests which together make up what is called a Litany, which means “list.” For example, *“In peace let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.** For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.** And so on.”* Another familiar form is, “Heavenly Father, we pray your blessing upon this congregation and that you would guide and prosper the work you have for us to do. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**” A nice feature of this form is it gives a rhythm to the prayer which adds momentum as we go through it. You can find Litany prayers in one of our hymnals and you can construct your own. These prayer forms have been used since almost the beginning of time.

Another structured form of prayer is Daily Prayer. This form flows from ancient times as a classic form of prayer. Martin Luther also presented this in the catechism as a desirable form of prayer for personal and family use. The structure of this prayer looks a lot like a worship service. The structure can include some sort of opening such as an invocation or bible verse, a confession, psalm, scripture reading, the creed, Lord’s prayer, and both pre-written prayers and conversational prayers. Daily prayer can be used in the morning and/ or evening and usually takes about 15 minutes. There are many good places to find orders of daily prayer. I hope to refer you to some of these next week when I cover the importance of rhythm in our prayer life.

Until then, the peace of God guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus as you believe and trust in him.  
Amen.

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