

How to Pray

By Bobby Schuller

We're in a series called "DIY: No one can follow Jesus for you." If you don't know, DIY means do it yourself. If you go onto YouTube, you'll find that there's millions of DIY videos on how to build a deck, how to bake a cake, whatever. And my daughter watches them all the time, and I'll be like oh that's how you make putty from scratch, interesting.

The reason I call it this is I felt going into this fresh year, we wanted to have a series that would basically talk about the basics of our faith. Many of you in this church are new Christians, many of you watching on television are new believers or thinking of becoming a Christian, and we want to talk about like how you do basic stuff as a disciple of Jesus. How you share your faith, how you read your Bible, how you practice the disciplines, what's the purpose of church. And today, we're going to talk about how to pray. And this is super important because prayer is obviously an inseparable part of the life of the believer, and it's something that doesn't just happen at church. It's supposed to be something that happens every day, a normal part of your life.

So today, we're going to talk about answering this question how do I pray? I'm glad you asked. I do think, in a way, prayer is a skill. I do think it's something you become good at. I do believe that the more you do it, the less awkward it feels, the more natural it feels to go to God, but

I also want to be careful in talking about that to think that because of your prayer or whatever, you don't think it's as powerful as say the Pope's. Did you know your prayer is as powerful as the Pope's? Did you know your prayer is as powerful as Chad Blake's? That's saying a lot. That is saying a lot. Your prayer is just as powerful as the most holy, righteous, godly figure you can think of. In fact, if you pray in Jesus' name and they don't, your prayer is more powerful. How's that? Because that's all it takes. To pray in Jesus' name means that you pray with the same power and the same authority that Jesus had, and He gives it to you. He wants every day people like you to pray and to pray boldly and to pray with faith and to believe that when you pray, God's going to answer you, and He will. God will answer your prayer.

So if we talk about prayer, the most important thing we can talk about in talking about prayer, is faith. That we actually believe our prayer is heard. That we believe that when its heard, God cares. And that because God cares, He will use the power He has to do something about it. It may not always be the result that you want, but I promise you it will move the Lord as it always does. And it'll move you, too, by the way.

So, many of us, we're thinking to ourselves then, well I don't always believe. Or maybe for you church lately has been more of a cultural experience rather than a spiritual one. Maybe your parents dragged you to church or something, or your spouse. Or maybe you're just here because one of your kids is in the choir or orchestra or

something, or I don't know, maybe you're just here for whatever reason, but you don't know if you really believe in this prayer thing. And can I tell you that every single person when they pray has one portion of their heart that doubts, and one portion of their heart that believes. I don't think there's probably a human being alive that when they pray, all of them believes, and I think that's okay. They know that it's okay, it is. Jesus taught us that if you have the faith of a mustard seed you can move mountains. And the way that I read that is if a lot of me doubts, but just a little part of me believes, and I give that bit to God and I sort of focus on that bit, God can use it. Not only can He use it, He will use it and He'll grow that little bit of faith into a lot of faith. Faith pleases God.

And so I want to convince you today, maybe you're here today and 99% of you is atheist, and 99% of you says I could never pray, but there's this little bit of you that says, well maybe. Well maybe. I want to encourage you, use that little bit when you pray, and your prayer can move mountains, and you'll see God do great things. God loves to prove Himself and show Himself, especially to atheists because He loves atheists.

So it's important to listen because even still, you say I'm not going to pray. You never know. You might find yourself in a fox hole. They always used to say in World War II, there's no atheists in a fox hole, right? You never know when you're trapped, when you're pinned somewhere and you have nowhere left to turn, you may want to turn to

God, so listen to what I have to say today because maybe five/ten years from now, you'll use what I'm about to tell you.

The first thing is lean into that little bit of faith. And don't over think it. If a little bit of you believes, good. And you have every reason to believe that prayer changes things. Every reason.

I was fascinated when I was reading one of my favorite books, *The Divine Conspiracy* by my dear friend, who has since passed, Dallas Willard, who was a mentor and a friend to so many pastors here in California. Dallas Willard wrote this book and in it he talks about this study about prayer, and he was a professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California, a secular university. And he cites that there has actually been not one, but over a hundred and thirty clinical scientific tests that have proved the efficacy of prayer. Isn't that astonishing? He pointed out one, which is maybe the most famous, and it's the one published in 1988 by cardiologist Randolph Byrd at the University of California San Francisco.

So Randolph Byrd, head of cardiology at the hospital of the University of California in San Francisco, put together a double blinded study. In this study, he broke up two groups, the first group that got prayed for, we're going to call the "prayer group." Everybody say prayer group. Now in a church, that can be confusing, can't it, because you sound like people that are praying. These are the people that got prayed for. A hundred and ninety two people that got prayed for, and then there

was a “control group.” Control means they didn’t get anything, and that was a group of 201 didn’t receive any prayer at all.

And the way that he set up this test is he took that half a group that was going to be prayed for, and drew their names out of a hat and gave their names, first name and then the first initial of their last name to three different churches and asked those churches to pray for them daily for, I forget how long it was, a certain amount of time. And so when those people were praying, they didn’t know who they were praying for. That was the first blind. So you weren’t praying for Bobby Schuller, you were praying for Bobby S. And so you would pray in this way, or you wouldn’t pray for Marc Riley, you’d pray for Marc R. So anyway, this is how you would pray, and so that was the first blind. They didn’t know who they were praying for.

But the second blind was to also eliminate the placebo. That is the people who were being prayed for didn’t know they were being prayed for. In fact, didn’t know they were being studied. And the doctors who were treating them, didn’t know they were being prayed for, either. So there was a double blind non connection physically between the people that were praying and the people who were being prayed for. You tracking with me so far? So this was done correctly. My guess is to probably prove that prayer does nothing, and what they found out was quite the opposite, but it was incredibly successful.

Here were some of the results. For the group, the prayer group, the ones that were prayed for, they were five times less likely to need antibiotics, meaning that they were five times less likely to have an infection. The prayer group was three times less likely to develop pulmonary edema. That was just like when you get liquid in the lungs, very dangerous for heart patients.

None in the prayer group needed life support, but 23 in the control group, that is group that didn't get prayed for needed life support. And then only three in the prayer group died, whereas 40 in the control group died. So in the group that got prayed for, three died, but the group that didn't get prayed for, 40 died. Now what's your first response? It's probably like why didn't they pray for those other people? And the reason is you can see very clearly the effective power of prayer on cardiology patients. And the answer is, of course, they wanted to have a legitimate scientific study to compare two groups.

Well of course when this study was published, it made waves, and I believe there's a 1988, I believe it made the cover of Newsweek and Time, it was in every newspaper, everybody was talking about it, and so of course both religious people and the scientific community sprung into action to have a massive public debate about whether or not this debate was real.

And one of the guys that wanted to repeat the test under his own lab was a guy named William Harris, who made this study even more

rigorous by including a continuous weighted system, and he actually got better results than Byrd did, and his conclusion to his study was supplementary (so scientific way to talk about prayer, isn't it) supplementary remote blinded intercessory prayer produced a measureable improvement in medical outcomes of critically ill patients. Who knew? That was Harris.

And then there was another article that was published in atheist.. do you have that quote on the next slide? And this was from William Nolan, who is also a doctor and he published this article in the Skeptical Inquirer: "It sounds like this study will stand up against scrutiny. Maybe we doctors ought to be writing on our order sheets, 'pray three times a day'. Heck if it works, it works." Hey, cool.

The thing I want to convince you is not that you're always going to get what you asked for. I mean three people in the prayer group still died, right? But to convince you that prayer moves the needle. That it does something. That it changes the outcome. And this is so important. That if we pray, not all of us but at least some part of us that believes that God has the power, that God is, and that God will respond to what I'm asking. It begins there.

And I don't know why, and to be honest it bugs me, but the Bible teaches us that faith pleases God. If we believe, that moves the needle. If we believe, it moves the mountain. And this is why it is so important that we talk about it in terms of DIY. That we don't always think I'm just

going to have somebody else pray for it. Look, God wants to hear your prayer as much as He wants to hear your pastor's prayer, or the Pope's prayer, or a priest's prayer, or a saint, your prayer is as powerful as if Jesus Christ were praying it Himself. That's what the scripture teaches us. That's what it means to live and speak and pray in Jesus' name. It means to do it as though Jesus Himself were doing it. Isn't that great? Everything as believers we do in Jesus' name, but when we pray, God is listening, so believe. Open your heart and let God move.

So when we pray, we ought to do our best to believe first, and to lean into the part of our heart that has faith, but secondly, to not be bashful or even quiet, in a way, when we're petitioning God, but to, as Jesus said, and this is what Hannah used in her scripture reading, to approach God boldly with shameless audacity. Everybody say shameless audacity. This is the phrase Jesus uses in the scripture, and I bet to teach on, to describe how we ought to come before the throne of God when we ask for something. Shameless audacity. That means that you ask for something that's so big and so bold, that if one of your peers overheard you, they'd be like (tsk, tsk, tsk). He's not even ashamed. That's audacious. Shameless audacity.

That's how we ought to pray. And we ought to come boldly before God's throne, and ask. God can say no. He has the power to do whatever He wants. But you're His kid. You're His kid. He likes to do things for His children. And that's important.

So in Luke chapter 11, Hannah read this, and it says this that one day Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray just as John had taught his disciples. This happens a lot. His disciples say Lord, teach us to pray. Why do you think they ask Him? Well first, even though He was the Son of God, Jesus prayed. That's important. It doesn't matter where you are, how long you've been a Christian, never stop praying. Look, prayer ought to be an important part of your life, and more importantly, when they saw Jesus pray, they saw something more than just prayer. They must have seen some kind of glory or power in Him. They also saw the results of His prayer and they wanted those same kind of results in their prayer.

And so they said Jesus, teach us how to pray. Now in Jesus' day, it was very common for rabbis who had a group of disciples, to teach them a short prayer they could memorize, something like the Shammah. And so Jesus taught them what we now refer to as the Lord's Prayer. Luke is an abridged version, but it says "Father, hallowed be thy name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins for we also forgive everybody else who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation." Very simple, right? You pray to God, not as King God on high, but as dad, as Father, and you honor His name, you call for His kingdom, you ask for what you need, you ask for forgiveness of sins, you promise to forgive others of their sins, and then you ask Lord, help us to not sin any longer.

Okay, but then He takes the Lord's prayer and He wraps it up in a parable as Jesus loves to do. It goes something like this. It says "suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, friend, lend me three loaves of bread. Another friend of mine on a journey has come to me and I have no food to offer him. And suppose the one inside answers, don't bother me, the door is already locked and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything." Just please go away. You're bugging me. I added that last bit. "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you bread because of your friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity, because you keep nagging him, you keep bugging him, you keep pounding on the door and quite honestly he just wants to go back to sleep, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need." A little commentary from me.

Real quick on this, in Jesus' day, and still today in the Middle East, hospitality was a big deal. It was one of the pillars of their culture, it was also a religious duty. It still is today, particularly in Islam. I remember when I was in Jerusalem with a friend of mine, who was European, and he was trying to explain to me how hospitable Muslims were. And we were in the Arabic quarter of Jerusalem and he picked a random door, knocked on the door, and asked if we could have something to eat, and this person like laid out a table and brought us tea and food. And it was crazy. Like I couldn't believe it. And that's how it was in Jesus' day, for the Jews in particular. Very hospitable. Sacred

duty that if a guest came to your house that you had to give him food and give them a bed and protection and shelter. Some cultures said if it was a complete stranger to up to three days you had to take care of some random stranger. Especially if they were an alien, the Bible says.

And so they would invite people into their homes. It is their sacred duty. And so very often people would travel at night to stay cool, so imagine it's like three in the morning, and you're sleeping, and your best friend comes to the door and he says I finally got here, and you're so excited to see him, you're like oh I didn't know you were coming. And your first thing is like I got to take care of my friend. You go to your kitchen and there's no food. There's no bread, there's no wine, there's nothing. And you think oh my gosh, what do I do? Right? It's your sacred duty, you're like Joe will understand. Next door neighbor Joe, I know he just went to the baker, he's got French rolls, sourdough, pentalucci. Cinnamon rolls.

Anyway, so he goes over to his neighbors house – Joe, Joe, Joe, Joe, Joe, hey Joe! Now in those days, too, most people, especially if they were poor, they had a one bedroom room with a furnace in the middle, and so Joe and his wife and his six kids would all be sleeping on the floor around a furnace, oftentimes if it was cold in the winter they'd bring in the animals, so you've got like eight people sleeping, plus like three goats and a chicken, they're all in this room, and the stupid neighbor next door is pounding on the door, Joe! I need to take care of my guest! Please!

Finally, Jesus says, when Joe gets up, it's not because he loves his friend. It's because he wants him to leave. He's bugging the, you know what, out of him. He's bugging the snot, that's what you know. He's bugging the snot out of him. He finally goes to the door and he's like oh, its three in the morning. He's like I know. Here's your bread, go away. Closes the door, right?

And the reason Jesus shares this story with the Jews is that He says look, if that's how a friend who in this case He's saying this isn't a very good friend. This is a bad friend. He's saying if a bad friend who is unjust and unkind to his neighbor Joe isn't going to help him out by just getting up real quick and giving him a couple loaves of bread, if even then he will still respond to his shameless audacity, how much more will your loving Father respond to His children? Keep knocking, keep asking, keep bugging God. Do it in a way that is shameless and audacious. Shameless meaning that what you're asking for is you don't deserve it. It's unfair. How could you ask for that? And audacity meaning that you don't stop, you just keep pounding, you just keep believing, you just keep trusting even though when you're praying, things aren't happening the way you want them to, you just keep asking God.

And some of the people I admire most in their prayer lives are the ones who pray with this kind of shameless audacity. One of my favorites is Dodie Osteen, Joel Osteen's mom, who I believe practically built that whole church just by one woman praying. I kind of wonder that

sometimes. I mean she's just such a powerhouse for prayer. And she doesn't pray in a like oh Lord, on high above. She goes hey God! This is literally how she prayed for Hannah and I, for our son Cohen, who has health issues. She goes, "God! Lord! They need you to heal their son. He's sick! How are they going to do ministry if you don't heal. Hey.." It's almost like she's like hey, hey, hey, hey, hey! Hey! Now this is very advanced prayer. This is high level stuff, okay? This is.. you got to be Dodie.. you got to be a living saint to get to this kind of level of prayer.

But you see, she's connected through the Holy Spirit to God, reminding God, ask.. like these words that make us in the Reformed tradition very uncomfortable, but they're in the Bible. She's reminding God. She's calling out on God. She's reciting God's covenant. She's reading back His law to Him, and His promises to Him. And she's doing it as she would a friend, a father. Lord, they need your help. Where are you? Help them. And as crazy as it sounds, that's the kind of thing I think of when I see Jesus saying, pray with shameless audacity. Very clearly, God wants to hear your prayer. I don't think God is offended by your shameless audacity. He's offended by your silence. God wants to hear from you.

That's why Tim Keller says, and I love this image, he says, "The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 AM for a glass of water is a child. We have that kind of access." Yes, God is king, He's Lord of lords,

He's the rock, He never changes, He's the God of the universe, but He's your dad! He's your dad.

So when we talk about DIY, how do we pray, some simple tips. First, when we pray, we pray in Jesus' name. Now again, as I said before, everything we do is in Jesus' name. It doesn't suddenly become Jesus' name because we say it, but when we pray, the reason we include and invoke the name of Jesus is not for God, it's for us. When you say 'in Jesus' name,' what you're actually saying is, the way I'm praying right now, it's just as if Jesus were praying. Jesus has given you, through your baptism, all of His authority to do His work, and to approach the throne of the Father in His name. Now that should make you feel very confident. Bobby might pray in Bobby's name, but you can pray in Jesus' name. That's confusing, isn't it. I pray in Jesus' name. What I mean is, when you go to your pastor, or somebody that you think is holy or righteous, if you simply pray in Jesus' name, you're praying in the name of the one who is the most righteous, who is the most godly, who is the most faithful. His name is Jesus Christ, and when you pray, it's as though He is praying Himself. Isn't that good news?

So in the same way, if Jesus ascended from heaven and put His hand on your shoulder and prayed for whatever is on your mind, your job, your elbow, your driver license, that you would lead that prayer with the same faith as if that happened. When you say in Jesus' name.

When you pray, don't just pray to God on high on His throne, the king, but pray to your dad, your father. I actually think it's a great discipline, if it doesn't hang you up too much, that when you pray, you actually say dad. Dad. This is what Jesus does. In fact, Jesus oftentimes uses the word Abba. Everybody say Abba. Abba is like saying papa, or it's like saying daddy. It's even more intimate than dad. It's like what a little child would say to their dad. He says Abba. And I think that we should pray in that manner. That we pray to dad. Imagine the best dad ever. And someone who is loving and kind, the dad you wish you had. And you pray to Him and ask Him, and watch as He responds because there's intimacy there. There's intimacy.

Maybe you're listening today and you're like well Bobby, that invokes some like baggage for me. Maybe your dad was abusive, or you didn't have a dad, and so saying dad doesn't feel good. Maybe try saying what Jesus said – Abba, and think about how that's like saying papa, Abba, Abba.

Number three, and this is so important: when you pray, talk like a normal person. Just talk normally. Don't make it complicated. God isn't going to listen to you more because you sound like Queen Elizabeth the first. I think it's so funny, when I was.. and there's nothing wrong necessarily with doing that, but I think that sometimes we say, 'oh thine father, bequeathed on thy holy mountain and the sacramental pavilion of thine grace. Blessed be thy name.' You know, this kind of thing. I think

it's so important that when you pray, you pray Father, dad, Abba. I need something from you. I need you to heal my elbow. I need you to help me find a job. Father, I want to find a husband. I want to find a wife. Father, I want to learn an instrument. Father, I need help with my money. Father, I need help with this addiction. Father, I need new friends. Father, I need a change in my life. Help me. Just talk to Him as a normal person. That's how you pray. It's just talking to God.

And then finally, and maybe the most importantly, just be consistent. Don't stop praying. You don't have to pray for hours, it's just like when you wake up, maybe say one sentence and ask God for something. Lord, I pray that I would have a good day today. I pray that my day would be peaceful and productive. Or Lord, I pray I could make a difference in John's life today, or Amy's life today. Whatever it is that the Lord.. whatever's on your heart, you just ask God for it and watch as He begins to move.

There's other types of prayer. Today we talked mostly about petition. There's also like prayers of communion, being in intimacy with God, and prayers of discipline, that is training your heart. We're going to talk about those in other sermons later on, in a couple weeks, when we talk about how to spend time with the Lord and how to have a quiet time, but today I just want you to know that when you pray, your prayer is powerful. Its powerful. Believe, be bold when you pray, and ask for whatever you want. God's going to say no sometimes for sure, but guess

what, He's going to say yes a lot of the time. And when He does, you'll be able to say look the good things that God has done in my life. And maybe it doesn't happen right away, that's not a no necessarily. Oftentimes it's just a not yet, so keep praying. Keep asking. Keep bugging and nagging God because you're not really bugging Him, you're not nagging Him, He loves to hear from you. He loves to hear you, and He loves to help you, and to make your life joyful and good, and I think that's a good thing, amen? Amen.

Let's pray: Father, thank you so much. We love you. We thank you. In fact let's just take a minute. If you have a special need today, let's all just like hold our hands out like this as a way of just kind of holding this thing before God, and I want you in your own mind to just bring it before the Lord right now. We pray together for these things, but I want YOU to ask God for this thing. Yes, you've asked a million times, a million and one isn't gonna hurt. Lord, we bring this thing before you and we do it with faith and boldness, and we do it in Jesus' name. And we approach you as dad, Abba. This is on our heart, Lord, in Jesus' name, amen.