

## **Other Questions About Prayer**

I hope you have found this course helpful. If so, would you please leave a review on Amazon and tell others about the course as well? Thank you.

Nevertheless, you probably still have several questions about prayer. Since this is a short course on prayer, I imagine that not all of your questions were answered. Let me address a few of these possible questions here. If your question is not answered below, feel free to submit your questions about prayer (or any other subject), by joining my online discipleship group at [RedeemingGod.com/join/](https://redeeminggod.com/join/). After you join, I will send you a few welcome emails and you can reply to any one of them to ask your question directly to me. You will also have the opportunity to take my online course on prayer (which is based on the content of this course) and receive further training about prayer by email. See you there!

### **Can I pray when I’m angry at God?**

Many people wonder if they should pray to God when they are angry at Him. Life causes much pain and hardship in our lives, and these situations can create feelings of anger and resentment at God for not protecting us from them. Also, we sometimes feel that even though we try our hardest to serve and honor God with our lives, He does not do much to reward or recognize our efforts, and it is easy to feel neglected and overlooked. In such situations, we might become angry at God. When people get angry, they tend to turn away from God and stop praying

But this is exactly the wrong thing to do when you are angry at God. Rather than cease praying when we’re angry, we should start praying even more, and then pray honestly to God, telling Him how angry we are and what we are angry about. In the experience of many, it is in our angry prayers where we often experience the greatest spiritual breakthrough with God. Why? Because it is only when we are angry that we finally let our guard down and tell God what is really going on in our hearts.

When we are not angry at God, we feel that we must hide our true emotions, thoughts, and feelings from God, and come to Him with pious words and “religious” language. But all such ideas disappear when we are angry. It is only when we are angry

that we let go of our religious attempts to not “shock” God with our emotions of fear, frustration, confusion, and doubt. It is only when we are angry at God that we are honest enough with God to tell Him what we really think with words that really represent what is in our heart. God does not want us to be alone in our pain and anger. He prefers to be with us in whatever we face, especially if we think He is the one who caused it.

God loves your honesty and will often meet you there. It is often only in the angry prayer where the honest requests of our heart are revealed. God is not offended when we get angry at Him. He is not shocked or outraged when the frustrations of this life finally get the best of us and we lash out at Him with a burst of emotion, and even foul language. Instead, it is here, I am convinced, that God lets out a loving sigh and says, “Finally! I was wondering when you were going to tell Me what was *really* going on. I know what has been eating at you, but until you were ready to talk to Me about it, I wasn’t going to force the issue. But now that we’re talking ... well, I’m talking, and you’re shouting ... we can finally start to communicate. So let it all out. Trust Me, I can take it. There is nothing you can say to Me that I haven’t heard a million times before.”

Remember, God is your friend, and He wants you to talk to Him like a friend. When you are angry at a good friend, you often shout it out with them, knowing that they will remain your friend no matter what you say. Honesty is always the best policy in friendship, even when it is honesty about anger and when the friend is God. So praying when you’re angry might be one of the best times to talk to God.

In fact, yelling at God actually reveals your love for Him. When you go to God in your anger, it is usually because you know He can be trusted with your raw emotions. Therefore, going to God in anger is not a sign of hate, but love. Going to God when you are angry and frustrated is an indication of your love for Him, because you are taking your biggest problems to Him.

Children often get angry at their parents for not giving them something they really wanted (like candy before dinner), or taking something away that they had (like a sharp knife). The parents, if they are good parents, do this because the parent sees the bigger picture and knows what is best. So while no parent enjoys having their children upset at them in such situations, the good parent can handle the child’s anger because they know they did what was best.

Similarly, since God is our Father, He sees the big picture and knows what is best for us. But like any children, we may get angry and upset at Him when life does not go as we

hoped, dreamed, or planned. Often, genuinely bad things truly do happen, and if we think God is someone who always protects us from bad things, we might feel like He has betrayed us. But the worst thing we can do in such situations is fail to go to Him with our feelings of anger and betrayal. He wants us to come to Him and tell Him what we are thinking and feeling. Such feelings are not sinful or carnal, but come from ignorance about the situation or about the true nature and character of God. It is only when we come to God in honest anger that we keep the lines of dialogue open so He can start to reveal to us the truth about Himself and how life really works.

In other words, God would rather have you come to Him in anger than run from Him in anger. When you are angry at God but try to hide it, this doesn't please God, for this is just a form of pious dishonesty. Therefore, if you feel like yelling at God, don't hold back. Tell God what is wrong. Tell Him what you think. Lash out at Him in anger, for there is no tongue lashing that is worse than the actual lashing He already received on the cross. In both cases, He accepts the pain out of His great love for us.

Recently, one of my daughters was angry at me, and I couldn't figure out why. As I tried to figure out what had happened, I gently probed her with questions. But rather than answer my questions, she just kept saying “Nothing!” No matter what I asked, that was her answer. This is how we act toward God when we don't vent our anger at Him, and instead just clam up about what we're feeling.

So yelling at God is a healthy spiritual and relational practice. The Psalmists all understood this, and in the Psalms, we encounter some of the angriest writing in all of Scripture and much of it is directed at God. The Psalmists had raw emotions and were not afraid to vent at God. If you ever feel like yelling at God, read some of the Psalms and yell at God along with the Psalmists.

So are you angry at God? Are you angry about something He allowed to happen in your life? Go ahead. Yell at God. Curse if you have to. There is nothing you can say that God hasn't heard already... It's not like God has virgin ears. Tell God your blasphemous thoughts. You have permission to be honest with God about your thoughts and your feelings. God always prefers angry honesty over the sullen silent treatment. So yell away.

In my own experience, the times where I have heard God's voice the most clearly are the times when I have just finished lashing out at Him in visceral anger and outrage at how He failed me, my family, or this world. It is after I have used God as a punching bag that I feel His arms wrap around me and say, “Well done. I'm glad you finally got that

out into the open. You’ve been hiding it away, and now that you’ve brought it out, we can talk about it. Oh, and by the way, before we do talk about it, I want you to know that I love you. Nothing you just said could ever get in the way of My love for you.”

And then we talk.

### **What about prayer for healing?**

I believe God can and does heal. But we cannot demand healing, and more often than not, God does not heal without the help of doctors and modern medicine. The vast majority of “divine healing” occurs in coordination with the divinely-guided medical practices of our day.<sup>1</sup> This is, in fact, what James is referring to when he writes about the effectiveness of anointing oil for healing. There is no “magical” healing power to anointing oil. Instead, rubbing, or anointing, with oil was a common medical practice in New Testament times. To learn more about this idea, read the following post:

[RedeemingGod.com/anoint-with-oil-for-healing/](https://redeeminggod.com/anoint-with-oil-for-healing/)

But regardless of whether or not healing occurs, you must not think that the absence of healing means that God is punishing you, has abandoned you, or is just waiting until you have “more faith.” Quite to the contrary, when you are sick and injured, God is right there with you, walking through the pain and suffering by your side.

It is so tragic when pastors and preachers tell people who are sick that they were not healed because they didn’t have enough faith or that God is punishing them for some sin. Remember that even Paul was not healed by God when he prayed to have the thorn in his flesh removed (2 Cor 12:8).

When you are sick, or when you pray for someone else who is sick, feel free to pray for healing. But if the healing does not come, know God is always with you, that He is not punishing you for sin, and that while He wants you to be healed, various unknown circumstances or factors are keeping the healing from occurring. God hates sickness, but a myriad of causes may be stopping God from sending the healing that both He and you want. In such situations, recognize that God is with you, by your side, walking through the pain and suffering, so that your experience can also be used to touch the lives of others who face similar challenges. In this way, while you may not be healed of your disease or sickness, it will be redeemed for God’s good purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> Oord, *Uncontrolling Love*, 191-216.

### **What about praying in tongues?**

I suppose this is another topic that will require a full book in this Christian Question series. My basic answer, however, goes back to the basic idea I have presented in this course about prayer. When I talk to a friend, I am only going to speak in a way that both of us can understand. If someone is speaking in tongues, then even though God can understand it, the person speaking cannot, let alone anyone else who happens to be listening. So I would say that anyone who desires to speak in tongues should do so only in private settings where they are having a private conversation with God, and even then, it is best to use words that you understand as well. A longer explanation will have to wait for another course.

### **What about praying Scripture?**

I am a big fan of praying with Scripture. This is when you take passages from the Bible and turn them into prayers. I am especially fond of praying the Psalms. Praying the Scriptures in this way allows us to know that we are praying according to the will of God (if we have properly understood the particular text), and also teaches us how biblical authors thought and prayed. You can read something I previously wrote about praying the Psalms here: [RedeemingGod.com/praying-the-psalms/](https://redeeminggod.com/praying-the-psalms/)

There is a drawback to praying the Scriptures, however. Once again, it all comes back to the idea that prayer is talking to God as you would talk to any other person. If a man wants to speak in romantic ways to his wife, he might be wise to begin by memorizing and reciting some romantic poems to her. But if this is all he ever does, then the romantic poems lose all romance, and they actually will harm the relationship rather than help it.

So also with any other conversation. If you want to talk about sports with a buddy from work, it might be helpful to read a paragraph out of the sports section of the newspaper as a way to get the conversation started, but if all you ever do is read quotes from sports columns, you are not likely to have many meaningful conversations with this other man.

It's the same with praying the Scriptures. Such a practice can be helpful, especially as a way to start a conversation, but if your prayer life consists only (or mostly) of just reading Scriptures to God, your prayer life will never grow or develop, and neither will your relationship with God. Use the Scriptures as prayer training wheels or conversation starters, but don't depend on them to keep the conversation going.

### **How Does God talk to us in prayer?**

I believe that since prayer is a form of communication with God, this means that God also communicates with us. The problem is that God does not seem to communicate with us the way we communicate with Him. But maybe some of this is because we have not trained ourselves to listen.

So I encourage you to spend more time listening when you pray. You are not listening for an audible voice or anything like that, but for God to impress upon you the things He wants you to do. This might come to you through feelings in your heart, thoughts in your head, or even with something like images, visions, or a still small voice. The difficulty, however, is discerning when such things come from God and when they come from the imaginations of our own heart. Furthermore, this difference is often only realized in hindsight.

Of course, if you want to hear God speak with a little more certainty, the best way is to read Scripture. Since Scripture is God’s inspired Word (2 Tim 3:16), this means that Scripture is God breathed, or God spoken, and so God has spoken to you through Scripture, and can even enlighten your mind and encourage your heart through the text of the Bible. While I often find that speaking to God with Scripture is helpful, I find that it is even more helpful to allow God to speak to me through the Scriptures.

But let me issue one warning. Regardless of how you hear the voice of God, never go up to someone else and say, “God told me ...” Just don’t do it. Make it a rule to live by. If you are right, and God truly did say to you what you want to share, then it will still be true regardless of whether or not you tack on the words, “God told me ...”

Furthermore, these three words are little more than spiritual boasting. They are often used by people who want to prove how spiritual they are, or who want to use God’s name as a trump card to get people to do what they say. In this latter case, such a use of the words “God told me ...” might be taking the Lord’s name in vain. If you claim that God is behind something you say, when in fact it is only something that came from your own heart and mind, then you are attaching God’s name to something He had nothing to do with in an attempt to give your idea or teachings more credibility. This is a very dangerous practice to follow. So whether God truly did reveal something to you or not, you don’t need to tell people about it.

Ultimately, hearing the voice of God is an important topic, but one which likely cannot be taught. But one thing is certain. If you think you hear God’s voice, it will

always lead you to act in loving, encouraging, and reconciling ways toward others. It will never be mean or judgmental. If you want to say something mean or judgmental to someone else, don't blame it on God. God's only activity toward humans is to love, heal, and restore, and so when He speaks to us, it will be in ways that encourage us to love, heal, and restore others as well.

Never forget that since God is a God of love, He very often does not tell us what to do, but instead asks us what we want to do. God is not a controlling God. He has given free will to humans, and part of God's journey with humanity is to go with us wherever we go. So the next time you pray, “God, what should I do?” recognize that He might be saying back, “I don't know. What do *you* want to do?” This then creates an opportunity to have a conversation with God about the various available options. Often, God is not as concerned with *what* you do, as much as keeping the lines of communication open with Him *as you do it*.

Here are several blog posts that are related to this topic:

[RedeemingGod.com/how-does-god-talk-to-humans/](https://redeeminggod.com/how-does-god-talk-to-humans/)

[RedeemingGod.com/how-to-hear-the-voice-of-the-spirit/](https://redeeminggod.com/how-to-hear-the-voice-of-the-spirit/)

[RedeemingGod.com/let-me-pray-on-that/](https://redeeminggod.com/let-me-pray-on-that/)

[RedeemingGod.com/taking-the-lords-name-in-vain/](https://redeeminggod.com/taking-the-lords-name-in-vain/)

### **Do I need to say “Amen” at the end of my prayers?**

I have a friend who was asked by his pastor to pray over a fellowship meal at church. My friend had not prayed publicly before and was a bit nervous. But he got through the prayer just fine by thanking God for the food and bringing a few requests before Him. Near the end of his prayer, however, he forgot how to “properly conclude” a prayer, and so just said what came natural to him. He said, “Well ... goodbye Jesus.” Everybody laughed, and he felt a bit ashamed afterwards, but I congratulated him and told him that God probably preferred “Goodbye Jesus” to the traditional ending of “Amen.” His concluding words were genuine, and showed that he was talking to God the way he would talk to anyone else. This is exactly what God wants and desires for our prayers.

Many people end their prayers by saying, “Amen.” While there is some biblical justification for this practice, the primary reason most follow this practice is because it is tradition. They hear others say “Amen” at the end of their prayers, and so they think that

this is how a prayer is supposed to end. Yet I encourage you to stop saying “Amen” at the end of your prayers. I say this for three reasons.

First, it was primarily used in corporate prayer situations, and was primarily spoken by those listening to the prayer, not by those doing the praying. In several of the passages that encourage this practice (cf. Deut 27:15-26; 1 Chr 16:36; Neh 5:13; 8:6), it is not the person praying who says “Amen,” but the people listening to the prayer. The practice of saying “Amen” seems to be a practice that was done during corporate prayer rather than private prayer, and was a way for the people to respond to what they were hearing.

But they weren’t saying “Amen” just because it was a spiritual thing to say. They had a reason for saying it. This leads to the second reason we can stop saying “Amen” at the end of our prayers. The word “Amen” means “Truly” or “So let it be.” When the people in Scripture said “Amen” as part of the corporate prayer, they were simply stating their agreement with what was said. Quite often in prayer meetings, I might find myself nodding my head in agreement or quietly saying the words “Yes” or “Yes, Lord” to what someone else is saying. This is similar to what the people were doing in Scripture when they said “Amen.”

Third, saying “Amen” at the “end” of a prayer causes you to think that your prayer is over. I find that when I say “Amen” at the end of a prayer, I subconsciously think that I am done praying. By saying “Amen,” I compartmentalize prayer and communication with God into an event that only occurs in specific places at specific times using specific words. But as we have seen in this course, just as an ongoing conversation with a friend or spouse is never over, so also, prayer conversations with God are never over. When you refuse to conclude your prayers with an “Amen,” this is a little reminder that your communication with God is ongoing and does not have a beginning or an end.

Nevertheless, despite these three reasons to not say “Amen,” there might be one instance where an “Amen” is helpful. This is when you are saying a prayer in front of other people, such as in a church service, a Bible study, or before a meal (but see the question below). In such situations, saying “Amen” is more for them than for God. It helps them know that you are turning from talking to God to talking to them. On the other hand, normal human conversations typically don’t provide these sorts of verbal cues to tell others when you are done talking to someone. You just finish your sentence, then turn to the next person you are going to talk to. With a little training, I believe that

pastors and Bible study leaders can do the same thing in their prayers. Talk to God with your eyes open, and then simply start talking to the people who are there. I have seen this done in churches and Bible studies from time to time, and I find it quite refreshing. God is treated like another person in the room, and when He is viewed this way, the person teaching the sermon or leading the Bible study then feels the freedom to turn to God again at any time during the service or study to continue the ongoing conversation with Him. In this way, the leader is not only teaching others about Scripture, but is also teaching others about prayer.

Such teaching about prayer through modeling prayer is also something that can be done at home with our children. One great way to do this is during our meals.

### **Do I need to pray over my meals?**

There are some Scriptures which seem to form the background for the tradition of praying over a meal (Deut 8:10; 1 Tim 4:5; 1 Cor 10:31; Acts 27:35; Matt 14:19-21). But none of these texts specifically command or require that we pray over our meals. God does want us to be mindful of Him when we eat, and to thank Him and give glory to Him for the food He provides to us, but is a perfunctory prayer before we eat really the best way to do this? I am not so sure.

I clearly remember the time when I first began to have second thoughts about the practice of praying over a meal. I was probably about nine or ten and was at a church “Pot-Luck” with my family. My father was one of the pastors and he asked a church elder to say the prayer over the meal. After asking us all to fold our hands, bow our heads, and close our eyes, he said, “God, ... thank you for this food. Amen.” Then he raised his head and said, “Let’s eat!” I remember being a little startled at such a short prayer. I looked around nervously at the adults and saw some of them glancing at each other with looks that said, “Did that count?” But nobody said anything, and we all started eating. That prayer stuck with me, and it was one of the first times I started questioning why we do what we do in the church, and that there might be a different way to pray than how I had been taught.

Today, my family no longer prays over our meals. I know that this may seem strange to people who grew up with the practice of “Saying Grace” before a meal, but I found that this practice had taught me some bad habits about prayer and I did not want to teach these things to my own children.

Prayers over meals are usually quite formal, repetitive, and perfunctory. Everybody bows their head, folds their hands, closes their eyes, and then one person says some words to God about food and a few other requests, and then closes the prayer with an “Amen” and everybody then promptly forgets about God and moves on with eating the food that is before them. I think it is better to not pray at all over your food than to treat God this way, or to teach others that this is how prayer works.

If you feel that you must pray over your meal, I invite you to keep your head up and your eyes open as you thank God for your food, and then don’t say “Amen” at the end of your prayer. Just turn from talking to God to talking to someone else at the table. This helps others see that communication with God is like communication with anyone else.

### **Do I need to use words in my prayers?**

God knows your thoughts, so you do not need to actually verbalize your prayers. You don’t need to say them out loud. In fact, you don’t really even need to think the words themselves. Many people think that praying is only happening when we say or think words, but since there are numerous forms of communication, I do not believe that words are the only way we can communicate with God.

One form of prayer I have often found to be helpful is what I call picture prayer, or imaging prayer. Though I have used this type of prayer for decades, I recently heard Greg Boyd refer to a similar practice he follows which (if I remember correctly) he referred to as “Imagining Prayer.” This form of prayer uses images and pictures in your mind instead of words. When I am praying for a certain situation or person, I find it very helpful to play a little movie in my head or draw a little picture of what I would like to see happen with the situation or person I am praying about. If I had a fight with my wife, rather than ask God for the ability to say I’m sorry, I imagine myself saying “I’m sorry” to my wife, and then hugging and kissing her. When I paint this picture in my head, I am also showing it to God, saying, “This is what I would like to see happen.”

I find this approach to prayer to be fun and enjoyable. We all like watching movies, and this form of prayer can be like a movie that you direct in your head. This is especially helpful for people who do not think they are very good “talkers,” or who tend to be more creative in their approach to life.