

## Prayer

From Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology*

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Sanctify, O Lord, those whom you have called to the study and practice of the arts of healing, and to the prevention of disease and pain. Strengthen them by your life-giving Spirit, that by their ministries the health of the community may be promoted and your creation glorified; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979*

### Advice on Prayer

- Doddridge: “Avoid the extremes of too mean and too pompous a style. Do not reduce prayer to familiarities and chatter.” Prayer is “the pouring out of the soul to God in the most genuine language.” We do not “pray as nobody ever prayed before.”
- Many churches make up prayer lists, so that individuals will be remembered in daily and Sunday prayer. While prayer lists normally include parishioners, it’s appropriate to add others to the list.
- Throughout the centuries, some have challenged the need for prayer. Here are some possible responses to some of the more common challenges:

### The Dilemmas of Prayer

1. Some would ask whether prayer is a form of self-deception. Aren’t we just talking to ourselves? Does God listen?  
The Spirit can help us cut through layers of self-deception to genuine disclosure and candid self-appraisal. True prayer, honesty before God, resists self-deception.
2. Is prayer just for people bottoming out on Skid Row? How is it relevant to the strong?  
The shipwrecked pray a different prayer from those who are in port. What’s different is the circumstance, not God’s listening. Prayers vary because circumstances vary. Time and experience change, prayer changes. Prayer remains addressed to God who transcends and encompasses all change.
3. If God is omniscient, why state what we want or need?  
Divine omniscience makes prayer all the more necessary and significant. While God knows our needs before we speak them, that is no reason to leave them unspoken since God freely welcomes dialogue. “We speak our prayers on God’s own cordial entreaty.”
4. Has scientific learning outmoded prayer?  
Suggesting that empirical science limits prayer fails to recognize that “empirical science itself is limited and changing in its scientific paradigms and conceptions of knowing the truth.”

### Things to think about

See Luke 18:10-14, the story of the Pharisee and the Publican. Who was *really* praying?

When you add non-parishioners to a parish prayer list, be sure to let one of the clergy know some of the details.

Prayer suffered somewhat in the Enlightenment. The Anglican Tradition, with its Book of Common Prayer, has for the most part resisted that aspect of the Enlightenment.

Prayer is a central aspect of Anglican corporate worship. It is also important for individual Christians. In Anglican thought, Christians can pray directly to God, without the need for intercession by a Saint.

God knows our needs. He often waits for us to ask. The asking need not be elaborate.

Science, with its rationalistic, “evidence-based” approach, sometimes tries to interact with philosophy and theology, with

Thomas Kuhn: paradigms undergo radical historical revisions from time to time. Although we live in a secularized high-technology society, we continue to believe that God exists and answers prayer.

5. Is asking for a special favor (perhaps for unjust or private reasons) inequitable?  
Jesus said, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done.” (Luke 22:42).
6. Do written prayers limit the Spirit?  
“The theological deficit in that assumption is that the Holy Spirit would not have us reason or use foresight or imagination or fit language.” It is wrong to assume that the Spirit only works through “emotive impulsivity” and “spontaneous feeling-flow”. The Holy Spirit works through discipline, reason, reflection, and organization.

### **The Triune God and the Modes of Prayer**

- A prayer is an act of worship
- There are three (triune) phases of worship
  - Opening sequence: awe, invocation, adoration, thanksgiving
  - Central sequence: confession, repentance, supplication, affirmation of faith, witness
  - Concluding sequence: grateful responsiveness, dedication, oblation, commitment to the Christian life
- Procession from a sense of awe (fitting to God’s holiness and mystery) to thanksgiving and praise (radical self-examination, becoming aware of sin and guilt, in repentance bring ourselves before the divine mercy). True repentance is the proper basis for hearing the good news of God’s forgiveness, to say the affirmation of faith; a response in offertory and benediction

### **Prayer to God the Father**

- Awe, reverence, unsearchable mystery, incomparable goodness, insurmountable power.
- Reverence is the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10)
- We present ourselves before God. Praise and thanksgiving. We thank the Father for life, the Son for redemption, the Spirit for the ongoing work of sanctification.

### **Prayer to God the Son**

- Sin. Confession. Petition for mercy and forgiveness. Prayer for pardon through the Son.
- Scripture reading; creed and sermon. The sermon makes it clear that the Father has come to us in the Son to offer newness of life, forgiveness, freedom, and love.

varying degrees of success. Alister McGrath, who has advanced degrees in molecular biophysics and theology, has written extensively on the interaction of science and faith, and natural theology. He is a leading opponent of the beliefs of Richard Dawkins.

See:

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~mcgrath/>

Anglicanism is all about written prayers, but all Christians should practice spontaneous prayer. Unlike your college English teacher, God doesn’t require perfect syntax and grammar.

Most prayers don’t need to be this elaborate.

Important to avoid modalism. God is one divine entity. Yet, we pray to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

### Prayer to God the Spirit

- Prayers addressed to the Spirit, who completes the work begun by the Father, revealed in the Son.
- Prayer for sanctification, as a response to the Gospel; the guidance of the Spirit to respond fittingly.
- Illumination; supplication (for ourselves), intercession (for others)
- Prayer of oblation, dedication. An offering of ourselves to God in response to his offering of himself to us

### Simple Prayers

- Prayers need not be elaborate. In a moment of crisis, a simple “God help me” is sufficient.
- Prayers need not be spoken.

### The Book of Common Prayer and Other Resources

- The BCP has prayers for various occasions, including prayers for healing. These are in sections called, “Prayers for the Sick” and “Prayers for use by a Sick Person.”
- The Episcopal Church, other provinces of the Anglican Communion, and other branches of Christianity have other prayer resources.
- These are “professionally” composed prayers that have been reviewed by a committee of theologians. They are great models for us to use and imitate.
- When you pray formally, in front of others, there’s nothing wrong with using these prayers as a basis for your own prayer.

### How to Write a Collect

- Typical Anglican prayer structure:
  1. Address prayer to God (“Dear God...” “Our Father...” etc.)
  2. Express gratitude in general (“We give you thanks for all the blessings of this life...”)
  3. Commentary appropriate for the nature of the prayer (“You are the source of all healing...”)
  4. Express gratitude more specifically (“We give thanks to you for this hospital and the people who work here...”)
  5. Ask for what you need (“Your servant Joe is here, and he needs your healing...”)
  6. Explain why you need it
  7. Express gratitude again (“We thank you that he is doing better...”)
  8. End the prayer (a simple “Amen” in a multi-cultural group; among Christians, something like “All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord...”)
- When pay a sick visit to an Episcopalian, it’s OK to use written

Repeat: prayers don’t need to be elaborate. God doesn’t require formal language.

One resource for health care professionals is: *Ministry with the Sick*, Church Publishing, 2005. Lots of prayers here, for various occasions and situations. Cost is about \$18.

When leading a large group in prayer, write the prayer in advance.

A collect is a prayer said in front of a group of people. You are “collecting” the groups thoughts and needs, and are presenting them to God on their behalf.

God is the source of everything in our world, including healing.

But, most Episcopalians

prayers from the BCP, *Ministry with the Sick*, or other resources.

### **Spontaneous Prayer**

- Most Christians would be somewhat amazed (and taken aback) if a chaplain came in, pulled out a book, and read from it.
- Pastors who lead spontaneous prayer in church have lots of experience doing this. Many will write out the prayer in advance, and memorize it.
- In most clinical situations, a short, spontaneous prayer, based on the above structure is all you need to do.

### **More about Spontaneous Prayer**

- Go ahead and ask for healing. Don't worry about the details.
- Don't worry about perfect grammar and syntax. After you're done, most people will remember that you led them in prayer. They won't remember exactly what you said.
- If you're nervous, say a silent prayer beforehand, asking God in His presence, to help you along as you lead the prayer.
- Practice makes better!

wouldn't mind a spontaneous prayer.

This is the "standard" for a sick visit. When you pray with Pentecostals, take your time. They will often repeat your words as you say them, a sure sign that God has helped you make a spiritual connection.

Keep it simple.

God is always present.

So, practice!