

## When We Cannot Pray

*By Linda Rex*

**May 19, 2024, Day of Pentecost / Easter**—One of the reasons people give for not being a Christ follower is that they do not believe they could ever be a person of prayer. Our understanding of prayer and all that it involves is often influenced by the way in which we were raised. I personally could never talk to God using “thee” and “thou” because this manner of prayer seems distant and disconnected from God. Others find this language quite helpful and needful. Our exposure to people who pray a certain way may also cause us to believe prayer is something we never want to do or never could do well.

Over the years, the Lord has helped me to come to a deeper understanding of what it means to pray. I have learned that prayer, when it starts with me and is about me, is often a self-centered or dictating monologue, where I tell God what he should do and what I want or expect from him. This is not what prayer is meant to be. As Jesus taught us to pray, our conversations with God are to revolve around Jesus Christ, the will of our heavenly Father, and his kingdom purposes being worked out here on earth by his Spirit. Prayer recognizes and confesses the love of God for us, and his care and provision for us each day.

As we come in the cycle of the Christian calendar to this day of Pentecost, we are reminded of the precious gift given to all—the Holy Spirit. The Spirit awakens us to faith in Christ, draws us together into spiritual community, the Body of Christ or the Church, wherever and however it gathers in the name of Jesus and worships God in Spirit and in truth. As believers are united with Christ by the Spirit, they participate in the inner fellowship of Father and Son in the Spirit.

In our New Testament passage, Romans 8:22–27, we are reminded that being swept up into the inner life and love of the Trinity means we participate in their fellowship with one another. This is where prayer begins—not within ourselves, but within the face-to-face relationship of our Father and his Son in the Spirit. Jesus gives us the things of the Father in the Spirit. And our response through prayer and worship is given to the Father by Jesus in the Spirit. We open ourselves up to the Spirit and remain in a position of listening and humble openness. Doing this, we know in our own spirit the desires of our Father and are moved to pray in agreement with God’s will.

The apostle Paul reminds us that all of creation longs for the transformation of all God’s children, for then creation will be restored to God’s original design. Our longing for heaven and all its glories is an expression of our own yearning for restoration and renewal. We long to be what God always meant us to be—beloved children living in union and communion with God—whether we realize it or not. The agonies and sufferings that go with our current existence, whether personal or global, are all a part of the process of what Paul describes as spiritual pregnancy. Birth pangs come unexpectedly and last however long it takes for the birth of the child. God has been working for millennia to bring his children home to himself. He is never in a hurry, it seems. We may wish he would hurry up. But he will bring us all, in his good time, to the glory he always designed us to share in.

The union and communion evident within the inner relations of Father, Son, and Spirit are fundamental to our understanding of what it means for us to pray. Even though each member of the Trinity is unique, the Persons of the Trinity are so well united that each one knows the other’s thoughts and intents. This is how the Spirit knows the mind, heart and will of our heavenly Father. And our Father knows the mind, heart, and will of Jesus and of the Spirit. And Jesus is one with his Father and one with the Spirit. It is this deep, whole knowing we are brought into through Jesus in the Spirit. This is God’s design for every human being—that we each participate in this deep knowing and being known.

More devotionals may be found at <https://lifeinthetrinity.blog>

Subscribe to Our Life in the Trinity YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@ourlifeinthetrinity>

We so often trivialize prayer into a brief formula or ritual. And there are times when prayer seems to be impossible or difficult. We may know it is something we should do, but our prayers seem only to reach the ceiling. It is important to remember that prayer begins within the Triune life and love where we are held, accepted, and beloved. Jesus prays for us. The Spirit intercedes for us. When we cannot come up with the words, it is God through Jesus in the Spirit living in us, who prays in our place and on our behalf.

This is why even written prayers or prayers from a common prayer book can be so powerful. It is our own spirit communing with God through Jesus by the Spirit which is central to prayer. Having a prayer partner, or a small group, who is Spirit-filled and Spirit-led, can be very helpful in enabling us to commune with God in prayer. I'm grateful to my friend Paula, who has faithfully prayed with me each week for many years. Our weekly prayer time has helped me to weather the dry seasons in my relationship with God, and to grow spiritually as we faced life challenges and difficulties together. It takes a willingness to be vulnerable, patient and understanding of each other's differences, and the grace of God's Spirit to come together with others to pray. But it is well worth it.

One day we will realize that prayer is nothing more than close, intimate conversation with Someone who knows us thoroughly and loves us completely. We will see that often the best prayers are when we are listening and responding to God's concern for his world and others. Our hearts will warm as we hear the voice of God's Spirit speaking Jesus' "Abba, Father" in our spirit, reminding us we are beloved, forgiven and accepted. We will understand that God has always been reaching out to us, sharing himself with us through Jesus in the Spirit, and including us in his life and love. And all the things we have made prayer into will fall away as we meet our Lord face-to-face in glory. How we, and all God's creation, long for that day!

*Thank you, Father, for your desire to have us be your beloved children, who live in close, loving fellowship with you through your Son in the Spirit. Teach us to pray, Lord. Enable us to listen more than speak, to hear your affirmations of your love and grace, and to allow your Spirit to lead us as we pray. Thank you, Jesus, for bringing us into the center of your Triune life and love. In your name and by your Spirit, we pray. Amen.*

*"For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." Romans 8:22–27 NASB*