

HOW SHOULD WE PRAY? Part 1

Youth Group Session Three

Following some short, age appropriate games and/or introductions, begin the lesson below. For younger children read for them – you may want to paraphrase and ask questions often to keep their interest. For older children, allow them to read aloud or to themselves.

When we go to Church every week, we *worship* God with our parish family. This is a very, very important form of prayer that also allows us to receive Holy Communion. There are also times, like here today, when we pray in a group outside of church services. We should try to find times to pray as a family when we are home, as well.

Jesus taught us that we must also pray privately, to have our own personal time with God. Private prayer doesn't take the place of going to church or praying with others. It's an important addition...like a plant needs light **and** water, we need public and private prayer to grow.

Read Matthew 6: 6. Where does Jesus tell you to pray?

That certainly doesn't sound like it would make it possible to pray without ceasing! But Jesus is telling us that our prayer should be between God and ourselves. We don't have to announce to the world that we are praying. Sometimes the room we go into can be a room in our hearts. Whether we are praying in words or through our actions and attitudes, we can trust that God is receiving our message...and that's what matters.

How we pray is very important. First, we must try very hard to clear our minds of everything else. This is very difficult at first because we have so much around us and so many things in our life to think about, but with practice it will get easier. Having a certain place to pray will help; maybe in your room or somewhere else in your house that is quiet. We should have at least one icon in our prayer corner to help us focus on what we are about to do. Maybe you can ask your parents to help you set up a family prayer corner that everyone can use. This can have a candle and incense or oil (*but these should only be used with your parents' permission and when they are at home with you!*)

Once we've cleared our minds we should think about what we want to say...for what do we need to ask forgiveness, do we have something for which we are especially thankful, do we know someone who needs extra help?

Now we are ready to start.

You should have your own Orthodox prayer book. Many of the prayers may be difficult for you now, but you will "grow into" them. Ask your parents and priest for help understanding the words you have trouble with. When you are saying the words of the prayers in your prayer book, you are using words from our Holy Tradition. The Church has prayed these words for centuries so we can trust that they are true and proper and pleasing to God.

This doesn't mean that you can *only* say prayers from a prayer book. You shouldn't skip prayer if you don't have your book. Perhaps you would like to add a prayer in your own words when you have finished the prayers of the Church. This is fine, and sometimes necessary for us. Just remember, who you are talking to! Even in our own words, prayer should be *reverent*.

One way to make your own words into a reverent prayer is to remember it can be GREAT.

Greeting...the special way we call upon God

Reason...are you asking for help, or giving special thanks, or just saying, "I love you?"

Emotion...explain how you feel: sad, afraid, happy?

Action...ask God for what you want...help with a special problem, good health, etc., and remember that it will be according to His will

Thanks...thank God for His blessings in the past and for accepting your prayer

Write a GREAT prayer here.

HOW SHOULD WE PRAY? Part 2: Building a Rule of Prayer

Once we realize how important and wonderful prayer is, we will want to pray more often. We will want to make sure that we have enough private time with God to say everything we need and want to say. The best way to do this is by building our own *Rule of Prayer*. Very simply, this means choosing a regular time and place to pray everyday, and choosing which prayers we will use. Not quite as simply, it means we then follow our rule!

The Church gives us beautiful prayers, and even tells when they should be used. But you may not be able to say them completely everyday when you have to get ready for school and out of the house in time for the school bus. Without allowing the proper time, you would have to say them so quickly that you wouldn't understand a single word. But you can still make them a part of your rule, by choosing a few of the prayers and *committing* to saying them every morning. Remember, being busy in the morning isn't an excuse to not pray. You may have to get up a few minutes earlier, or rearrange your routine, in order to have time to pray. But a rule's a rule!

Following your rule will get easier the longer that you keep at it. Just as your body lets you know it's time to eat, your heart will remind you that it's time to pray.

You can start to build your rule of prayer right now. Think about your days at home. Look at the schedule that you just wrote down. Are there times that you pray now? Do you have enough peace and quiet at those times to pray sincerely? Is there a time that would be better? What can you do to make a time better? Do you think you should *add* a time for prayer? Take a few minutes to think about these questions, and write the time or times you will *commit* to being part of your rule.

Once you have chosen the time you will pray, choose the prayers you will start with. Keep it simple at first, and choose only prayers that you know you will not have to hurry through, ones you can concentrate on and say sincerely. (The prayers of our Church can be difficult for young people. When you choose a prayer, go over words that you don't understand with your spiritual father. Never be embarrassed to ask for help.)

Now that you've set a place and time to pray and chosen which prayers you'll say, you're ready to start living your rule. Give yourself some time, you may find that you have to make some changes once you get started. The important thing is to stick with it! Don't give up, even if you've skipped or haven't been able to keep to it perfectly. Just start again. This takes *discipline*. Remember, the Holy Spirit is in you, helping you.

You should also try to add Holy Scripture into your rule, perhaps not every day at first, but once or twice a week. Do you know where to locate the daily scripture reading? _____

The Psalms are beautiful prayers you can read. Find out the Epistle and Gospel reading for Sunday, and read them on the Saturday before.

Your rule of prayer will become a part of your life. Make sure that it grows as you do. You'll know when the time has come to add some time and another prayer or two. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Starting to live a rule of prayer at a young age is truly a wonderful gift to give to yourself. It will help you keep the Holy Spirit alive in you, growing with you, ready to share all the many joys and sorrows that are to come.