

Nine Tips for Effective Prayer

Biblical keys for praying with confidence, faith, and a clean heart

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

JAMES 5:16

AT A GLANCE

BIG IDEA	Prayer isn't a magic formula; it's a conversation with the living God. Nine biblical keys help us pray effectively: know who you're talking to, pray in Jesus' name, pray with faith, spend time alone with Him, come boldly, pray for His will, keep a clean heart, pray for others, and expect God to act.
SCRIPTURE	Hebrews 4:16 · John 14:16-26; 15:4-7 · Ephesians 3:12, 16-19 · James 1:6; 5:16 · 1 John 5:14-15 · Psalm 66:18
LENGTH	About 25-30 minutes, or teach as a three-week series (three tips per week)
BEST FOR	Middle school and high school
YOU WILL NEED	Bibles and a prayer journal or notecards for each student

Start here: does prayer really work?

James says, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). "Avails much" means it accomplishes a lot. Prayer isn't a magic formula that makes God do what we want. It's a real conversation with our Father. Here are nine keys from Scripture.

1 Know the God you're talking to

God has spoken to us most clearly through His Son, who is "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person" (Hebrews 1:3). If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. Jesus also promised the Holy Spirit, our Helper, who lives in every believer (John 14:16-17). He "will teach you all things" (14:26). So prayer includes listening, especially as you read His Word.

2 Ask in Jesus' name

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7). Praying "in Jesus' name" isn't just a phrase we tack on at the end. It means praying with His authority and in line with His character, the kind of request Jesus Himself would sign His name to.

3 Pray with faith

Faith isn't just believing facts about God. "Even the demons believe—and tremble!" (James 2:19). Faith is trusting God personally. And if your faith feels small, be honest like the father who cried, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). Jesus answered that prayer.

4 Spend time alone with God

Jesus taught us to go into our room, shut the door, and pray to our Father in secret (Matthew 6:6). He practiced it too, rising early to pray in a solitary place (Mark 1:35). He said, "Abide in Me, and I in you" (John 15:4). Abiding means staying close, like a branch connected to the vine.

5 Come boldly

When Jesus died, the temple curtain that blocked the way into God's presence was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). Now in Christ "we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him" (Ephesians 3:12). "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16). If you've never been made right with God, start there: "Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1).

6 Pray according to God's will

"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." **1 JOHN 5:14**

The more we know God's Word, the more we know His will. And when we're not sure, we can pray as Jesus did in Gethsemane: "Not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). God answers in different ways: sometimes yes, sometimes no, sometimes wait. He always answers in love.

7 Keep a clean heart

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Psalm 66:18). Isaiah warned, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God" (Isaiah 59:2). The man Jesus healed said it simply: God hears the one who worships Him and does His will (John 9:31). The good news: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us" (1 John 1:9). Confess first, then pray with a clear conscience.

8 Pray for others

"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). Praying for others takes our eyes off ourselves and joins us to God's work in their lives. Keep a list of friends and family to pray for by name.

9 Expect God to act

"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind" (James 1:6). God "is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Write down your requests and watch for His answers.

FOR THE LEADER

Be careful that students don't hear "If God didn't answer, you didn't have enough faith." Jesus Himself prayed "if it is possible" and accepted the Father's will. Faith trusts God's answer, even when it's no. Have students start a two-column prayer journal: *What I asked* and *How God answered*.

TALK IT OVER

1. Which of the nine tips is newest to you?
2. What does praying "in Jesus' name" really mean?
3. Why can we come "boldly" to God? What made that possible?
4. How does unconfessed sin affect our prayers? What's the solution?
5. How has God answered your prayers in the past: yes, no, or wait?

TAKE IT HOME

Start a prayer journal this week with two columns: *What I asked* and *How God answered*. Each day, spend time alone with God, confess anything that's between you, pray for one friend by name, and write down one request. Look back in a month and see what God has done.

Come boldly, pray humbly, and watch God work.

From fifty years of youth ministry by **Ron Whittam**. Share freely with your students and leaders. · The Youth Ministry Living Room · qrprogramming.com/livingroom

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