

## Teen Lesson 3: Build a Friendship with God

*As you read through this lesson, look up as many of the highlighted scripture references as you can. These support the text and studying these scriptures in your own Bible will increase your understanding and enable you to prove this material for yourself.*

In the second lesson we examined three qualities that make a good friendship - *trust, common interests* and *respect* - and we learned that these three qualities are also important in building a relationship or friendship with God. If we want to have a good friendship with God we need trust Him, be interested in Him and respect Him.

But in order to *build* this friendship we need to *spend time* with Him - because that's how people become friends. They spend time together and they talk a lot - and that's what we need to do if we want to have a friendship with God.

But how can we talk to someone we can't see? And how can we listen to someone we can't hear? I'm sure the answer is obvious to those of you who have grown up in God's Church. It's by letting God talk to us through His Word, the Bible - and by talking to Him, through prayer. You may know this academically because it's something we are encouraged to do and you've probably heard many sermons about it. But have you been motivated to spend time talking to God in this way yourself? Have you been motivated to start reading your Bible? You see, if you want to build a friendship with God, that's exactly what you have to do - and we're going to discuss HOW to do that in this lesson. We'll begin by looking at prayer.

### Talking to God

The first thing you need to know is that there's nothing mysterious about prayer - it is simply conversation with God. And He makes it very clear that those who have a relationship or friendship with Him will be people who pray - who spend time talking to Him.

Christ tells us some things about praying in **Luke 18:1** and **Matthew 6:6-7**. As you read these verses, notice that He doesn't say *if* you pray, but *when* you pray. That's because it's something God expects His friends to be doing regularly!

The subject of prayer is huge, and it's not my intention to tell you everything you need to know about prayer in this lesson! I simply want to encourage you to talk to God if you don't already. However, the scriptures we've just read in Matthew 6 do give us a few pointers on what TO do and what NOT to do when we pray - and I think it would be helpful for you to know what these are as you begin to communicate with God. So let's take a look at them.

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First of all, these scriptures tell us TO:

### 1) *Pray in a private place*

It's best to find someplace where you can be by yourself for a while when you talk to God. But you don't have to pray out loud! You can whisper or even pray silently if you want to.<sup>1</sup> And even though you may have heard that you should pray on your knees, at this stage it really doesn't matter what position you are in when you talk to God.<sup>2</sup> What's important is that you start doing it. You can pray on your knees, standing up, lying in your bed, sitting in a chair or going for a walk.<sup>3</sup> God will listen to you *however* you pray.

### 2) *Pray to the Father*

When you pray it's important to think about WHO you are talking to - you're not just talking to the ceiling or to the sky! You are talking to the GREAT God of the whole universe - who wants to be YOUR friend! That's amazing!

Then these verses tell us NOT to:

### 3) *Use vain repetitions or rote prayers*

Many people in the world have set prayers that they use for different occasions. Things that they've memorised - and can just rattle off. But that's not what God wants us to do. He wants us to think about what we are saying and pray from the heart.

## What to Pray About

Sometimes young people (and adults as well for that matter) aren't sure what to pray about. But Christ gives us an example of what we should pray about in the next few verses (**Matthew 6:9-13**).

This is commonly called "The Lord's Prayer" and many of you may know it by heart. Most British schools, for example, still have a religious assembly of some sort during the day and children learn to recite the Lord's Prayer from a very early age. But this

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, **1 Samuel 1:12-13**.

<sup>2</sup> Jonah prayed from inside a fish (**Jonah 2:1-2**); Paul & Silas prayed with their feet in stocks! (**Acts 16:23-25**).

<sup>3</sup> See **1 Kings 8:54**, **Psalm 95:6** & **Acts 20:36** for examples of kneeling in prayer; **1 Samuel 1:26-27**, **Mark 11:25** & **Luke 18:11-13** for examples of standing to pray; **2 Kings 20:1-5** & **Psalm 63:5-6** for examples of lying in bed to pray; **2 Samuel 7:18-27** & **Nehemiah 1:4** for examples of sitting to pray; **Luke 2:20** & **Acts 3:8-9** for examples of praying while walking. We can also pray and praise God by singing (**Psalm 9:1-2**), dancing (**Psalm 149:3**) & playing musical instruments (**Psalm 150**). The point is that God wants us to pray at all times (**Psalm 34:1**; **Ephesians 6:18**).

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prayer wasn't recorded in the Bible just so we can learn to recite it from memory! Jesus used it as *an outline* to teach His disciples *how* to pray, and it's one that we can use too.

In **Matthew 6:9**, Christ tells us to begin our prayers by recognising and acknowledging *WHO* we are talking to. The word "hallowed" means that God and His name are holy and should be greatly respected - and we show our respect and honour to God by praising Him (see **Deuteronomy 32:3-4** and **Psalm 145:21**). If you're not quite sure how to do this, then a good way to start is by simply reading one of the Psalms out loud as you begin talking to God. Many of David's Psalms show us how he praised God - for His greatness, His power, His glory, His love, His mercy, etc - and we can learn a lot from him. See, for example, **Psalms 8, 9, 34, 66, 103, 104, 106, 112, 113, 118, 134, 135, 136** and **138**.

Of course there will be times when you won't have time to praise God when you talk to Him! For example, if you need God's help quickly for some reason, you're not going to take the time to praise Him - you're simply going to ask for His help! And that's OK. Jesus is just making the point that this is a good way to start our prayers because it gets our minds off ourselves and focuses our minds on God's power and glory.

In **verse 10**, Jesus reminds us to pray that God's Kingdom will come. Why? So that God's *will* can be done on earth just as it is already being done in heaven. Most of you realise that there are a lot of things wrong with this world and that many people are desperately unhappy. The only way everyone in this world will know *true* happiness is when Jesus Christ returns to establish God's Kingdom. And that's why we should pray for it. This is something to remember whenever you see injustice in the world or whenever terrible disasters strike.

In **verse 11**, Christ tells us to talk to God about our daily needs. This is easy to do because we all have needs - whether it's simply money to buy food or clothes, help with exams at school, confidence to give that speech, or courage to do the right thing when those around us are not!

**Verse 12** reminds us that we need to ask God for forgiveness when we've done something wrong - and that we also need to forgive those who wrong us. This isn't always an easy thing to do, but it's a right habit to get into. Then in **verse 13** Christ tells us that we need to ask God to protect us from the temptations that we face every day. There are many temptations in this world and you don't really need me to tell you what they are! But they range from the extremely harmful temptations of drugs, alcohol and illicit sex, to those that may seem less dangerous, like how much chocolate you eat or what you watch on TV!

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Christ finishes His instruction by reminding us to praise and thank God as we end our conversation with Him. And if you've grown up in God's Church, you already know that we finish our prayers with the phrase "In Jesus' name, Amen". We do this because Christ tells us we are to pray in His name in **John 16:23-24**. We'll learn more about what this means in a future lesson, but you might also want to read **Colossians 3:17** in this connection.

### We Can Pray About Anything

By giving us a model prayer, Jesus wasn't restricting us to just talking about these specific things when we pray - He was simply giving us a guide so we'd know what to pray about! In actual fact, you can talk to God about anything you want to. If you take the time to read the Psalms you'll find that David often just talked to God about how he felt. When he was angry, sad, depressed, happy, frightened, nervous, or confused, he talked to God. And so can we.

As I said earlier, it doesn't really matter how you pray at this stage, the main thing is to set yourself the goal of talking to God each day - even if it's only for a few minutes. Tell Him about your day, ask Him for help, tell Him how you feel, and talk to Him about what's worrying you. And remember to thank God for the good things He has given you - and to pray for others (especially people you know) who are sick or who need help in some way.

### Listening to God

Every time you talk to God you are spending time with Him and building your friendship with Him. But if that's all you do, then you're simply building a one-sided friendship! And those kinds of friendships don't last. For a friendship to thrive there has to be give and take.

So the other thing you have to do to build a friendship with God is spend time listening to Him every day! And the way we do that, of course, is by reading the Bible. There are lots of ways you can do this. You can start at Genesis and simply read a bit each day until you've read the whole Bible. You can use a concordance and study topics that interest you. You can read a Psalm a day or a Proverb a day. You can focus on reading about the life of Christ or the apostle Paul. You might be surprised to discover that the Bible is not only full of instruction, but parts of it are quite exciting!

So set yourself the goal of reading some of your Bible every day - even if it seems hard or boring at first and you'd rather be doing something else! It might help to use a good modern translation that uses language that's easier to understand. And there's nothing wrong with doing that - as long as you remember that it may not be as accurate

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as more traditional translations. (I often use a modern translation for my own personal study, but keep the King James Version handy so I can compare passages if necessary.)

Remember, too, that the Bible is God's Word - God's message to us - and the more you read it, the more interesting it will become. That might sound strange at first, especially if you think the Bible is boring to read! In fact, I can almost hear some of you thinking, "If I think the Bible is boring now, HOW can it possibly become more interesting if I read more of it?" Well, I wonder if you can remember what it's like when you meet someone for the first time and start to become friends? Sometimes it's hard work - especially at first - but then the more you get to know the person, the more you want to spend time with them. This is EXACTLY what happens in our friendship with God. The more we talk to and listen to Him, the more we will want to! And as you talk to God and read His Word, you will also strengthen those three important qualities of friendship that we talked about last time:

Trust: By talking to God, receiving answers to your prayers, and reading about people in the Bible who trusted Him, you will learn to *trust* God yourself.

Common Interests: By reading the Bible you will also learn about the things God wants you to be interested in and how He wants you to think. And over time you will begin to develop the *same interests* in these things. By talking to God you can share your thoughts and dreams with Him - the things that *interest* you. And even though He already knows all about you, God still wants you to discuss these things with Him. That's what friends do.

Respect: You can show respect to God by living the way He wants you to - and you find out what *that way is* by reading the Bible. You can also express respect to God by talking to Him and being thankful for what He has done for you.

### Conclusion

By spending time with God and developing these qualities of friendship, you *will* become God's friend. In fact, it will be impossible not to! And the really wonderful thing is that you can start building this friendship now - you don't have to wait until you're grown-up!

However, the Bible reveals that our friendship with God is ultimately made possible through - and *only* through - Jesus Christ (John 14:6). So the next (and most important) thing we need to do to build a friendship with God is learn about Jesus Christ and how He makes this friendship possible. We'll start this process in the next lesson as we begin a study of Christ's life and His teachings.