

Prayer Advice from Martin Luther

Matthew Ruttan | March 2015



Martin Luther was a 16th century German theologian who had a massive impact on Christian thought. In a letter to his barber, Peter Beskendorf, he gave some advice on how to pray that continues to be helpful today.

First, he suggests praying **twice a day**—once in the morning, once at night. (Not to limit us, of course, but this is a guide.) Further, it shouldn't depend on our mood; we pray no matter what we "feel" like doing. This prayer discipline helps us resist urges to postpone prayer or get down to other work before praying. The modern cancer is busyness.

Second, he suggests that this kind of prayer—a kind of *contemplation*—be **based on the Bible**. Choose a passage that you know well, something like the 10 Commandments.

Third, divide each command/clause/line into **four parts** as you move into the prayer:

1. **Instruction** (consider what God is teaching you as it relates to this line)
2. **Thanksgiving** (be thankful for how God has been active/generous in your life in this way)
3. **Confession** (confess before God how you have not fulfilled this command/principle/idea)
4. **Pray/Help** (ask God to assist you in living more faithfully as it relates to this command/principle/idea)

Fourth, he suggests dwelling on **The Lord's Prayer**—after all, those are the words *Jesus himself* taught us to pray. I like to think of it like this: The Lord's Prayer is a mission statement.

Last, pay attention for the **Holy Spirit**. When you sense the Spirit directing you, stop whatever else you're doing, and pray for what God has put into your mind.

As a help, here are the 10 Commandments and The Lord's Prayer so that they are at your fingertips:

The 10 Commandments (Exodus 20: 1-17)

1. You shall have no other gods before [the Lord]...
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol...
3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God...
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy...
5. Honor your father and mother...
6. You shall not murder
7. You shall not commit adultery
8. You shall not steal
9. You shall not give false testimony...
10. You shall not covet...

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6: 9-13)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

Closing Encouragement

Luther was a prayer warrior. His friend Veit Dietrich wrote, "There is not a day on which he does not devote at least three hours... to prayer." Wowzers! That's serious. But no matter where we are in our journey, perhaps Luther's advice can span 500 years, reach into today, and help us commune with God in a fresh and dynamic way.

As Oswald Chambers said, "Prayer is not preparation for the work, it is the work." That might seem strange in a day when we often think that words have little value—and especially words addressed to God. But *prayers speak louder than words*. If they didn't, would Jesus have taught us to pray, or that God answers? "God does answer," writes Karl Barth. "He is not deaf, he listens and, moreover, he acts. He does not act in the same way whether we pray or not. Prayer has an influence on the action, on the very existence, of God." Boom.