



# TALKING with God

by the Rev. Arden W. Mead



*Introduction and conclusion have been adapted from C. Welton Gaddy's book, "A Love Affair with God," ©1995. Published by Broadman & Holman Publishers. Used with permission.*

## Introduction

Praying is one dimension of being in love—being in love with God. The metaphor of a love affair may prove helpful to you.

A right relationship with God involves falling madly in love with God and nurturing that love to grow and mature.

To pray to God is to speak freely and intimately to God within the security of that loving relationship. The conversations of a love affair comprise the content of prayer.

How do you define prayer? You don't need to.

A lot of religious matters seem to be "carved in stone," as they say. There's only one right answer, one right way to do something—period.

But, prayer isn't like that. Who can do it, how it can be done, where you can pray, what you pray for—that's for the one praying to decide.

## Taking a Glimpse

Let's take a glimpse into God's Word, converse with Him, and reflect upon His invitation to lovingly converse with Him through prayer.

As for the One being prayed to—"When you pray, say: 'Father, ...'" (Luke 11:2).

## Talking with God

Lord, is it all right if I just sort of  
talk to You like this?  
I mean, I'm not even sure  
how to address You because—  
I'm not used to talking with a God.  
I'd feel strange saying,  
"Your Majesty" or "Your Holiness"  
(although those names  
are appropriate enough).  
But those words would make You seem  
far away—  
and terrifying.  
It would feel like talking to a volcano  
or an atomic bomb  
or my boss  
or the principal  
or a judge who knows I'm guilty.

Sometimes You seem like all of those to me.

Sometimes I think You are those things.  
But when I pray to You,  
I need to see something gentler,  
kinder, wiser.

I'm told that Jesus taught His followers  
to call You "Father."

That helps.  
I think of my own dad—  
(And I realize that for some people  
the idea of a dad may not be a  
pleasant one.  
I'm sorry for them,  
and I'm glad for them that You  
are what all fathers are  
supposed to be.)

I like the fact Father is a human term,  
because that's all that I am  
and, yet, the God of all ages of  
time who whirls solar systems  
and universes around has made  
Himself known to me in a word I understand—Father.  
I expected something more difficult.

## Reflecting on Prayer

Even though God has presented Himself to us in the image of a father, as well as with other gentle and reassuring images such as "Shepherd," "King," "Friend," we still may not be eager to pray to Him. That reluctance sometimes is because of what we think we're like rather than what we think God is like.

## Taking a Glimpse

*"How precious to me are Your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!"* (Psalm 139:17).

## Talking with God

Father, it's strange enough  
to think of You in human terms,  
but even stranger still to realize  
that You are thinking of me.

What do You think of me?  
I have the feeling Your attitude  
toward me is one of love  
(that just seems to go along  
with the idea of Father).

Which leads me to conclude  
that You see me as a child—  
*Your* child.

After all, You created me and,  
in spite of my occasional complaints,  
You did a superb job.  
You also made everything else—  
the good things, that is,  
and gave them to me to use.

Things like  
food and clothing,  
health and shelter,  
work to do,  
pleasure,  
other people.

You made and gave to me not only things,  
but procedures and processes, too:  
the turning of the world to make  
sunrise and sunset,  
the mystery of plants growing  
from seed,  
the wonder of pregnancy,  
elements, molecules, gravity,  
magnetism, heat, digestion,  
breathing, memory.

All of that—  
for me.  
That tells me that You spend  
more time being concerned  
about me—  
and lovingly so —  
than I spend thinking about You.

Does it bother You, Father,  
that people like me too often take  
You for granted?  
Or that people like me use some  
of what You've given  
in the wrong way?  
to cheat and lie?  
to hate and judge?  
to desire and take?

And, then, I'm reminded that even for  
that You've given us a process that saves.  
Jesus Christ died on the cross  
for me. You forgive me, Father,  
because of Him.

And I am a child just born in Your eyes.  
Perfect again.

## Reflecting on Prayer

Sometimes prayer comes down to a matter of our saying something and then standing back waiting for God's answer to happen. We anticipate God's response as something like an explosion—sudden and dramatic—or something like a slowly burning candle—obvious, but tending toward the ordinary. The idea is that the effect of our prayer is something that takes place outside ourselves. We ask for it and then sit back and watch it happen. In fact, others should be able to see it, too. What *really* happens, though, is often noticeable only to ourselves and God.

## Taking a Glimpse

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

*Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:7-11).*

## Talking with God

Does anything happen when I talk to You?

It's hard for me to imagine that  
You're just sitting up there in  
heaven with nothing on Your  
mind and nothing special to do  
until someone down here puts in  
an order and asks for something  
to be done or given.

That's not the way it works, is it?

Of course it isn't.

And I think I already knew that,  
because when people pray,  
*“Hallowed be Thy name,”*  
Your name continues to be holy,  
just as it has always been holy  
and always will be holy, whether  
we consider it holy or not, or say  
that it is or it isn't.

And when people pray,

*“Thy kingdom come,”*  
You don't begin at that moment  
to first send it. You promised it  
would be here a long time ago.  
They say it came in the person of  
Jesus Christ. You didn't wait  
until we asked for it.

And when people pray,

*“Thy will be done on earth as it  
is in heaven,”* I suspect You get  
done what You want done when  
You want it done and where You  
want it done even if nobody  
gives You permission by asking  
it to be done.

Come to think of it,

You even give *“daily bread”* to  
people who never even would  
think to ask You for it because  
they don't realize where it  
comes from.

So what's going on?

Does praying really change anything?

It has changed me.

To pray to You has made me  
think about You for a change  
(something I haven't done for a  
long time; and I'm sorry I haven't).  
That's significant.

Praying has led me to come up with a picture of You

and led me to understand what I am like, and it's made me think about everything I have in this world—where it comes from, and why I've got it.

That's a change, Father.

But Jesus' prayer goes further.  
*"And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."* When I ask for that—something definitely happens.  
I am forgiven.  
So are the people who hurt me.  
And by following Your example, I can restore a broken relationship.

This forgiveness You asked us to pray about—  
it's not something new, is it?

You promised it to Your world,  
to Your children all through the centuries.

And You made Your promise good when You sent Your Son,  
our Savior, Jesus Christ,  
into our world.  
He lived perfectly.  
He died once on behalf of all of us.  
He rose again and draws us after  
Him into heaven.

That's the promise You kept. That's why I know I'm forgiven.

That's why I know something happens when I pray.

And I can trust You in everything else, too. So I can pray the rest of Jesus' prayer: *"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,"* and be confident that You'll come through on those concerns, too. Like a loving Father, You'll never do what is bad for me.  
Like a protective Father, You've made me safe from whatever Satan thinks he might be able to get away with.

(Some creatures are that stupid—they don't know whose world this is!)

There's a lot going on when I pray.

Most of it goes on even when I'm not praying. So I'm the thing that changes through prayer.

My attitude changes as I remember who I am—Your child,  
beloved, cared for,  
but still a child.  
And since children don't always know as much as they think they do and usually can do much less than they try to do,  
they need a loving father to provide them with all that is best for them.

Help me put the stress in my prayer where it belongs;  
on *You*, not me,  
and then to trust You for all the rest of what I need and some of what I want  
that You would like me to have.

(I've never said anything like that before, Father. So if talking with You like this can make that much of a change in me, then prayer really works, doesn't it? It's something far more powerful than I had thought.)

## Reflecting on Prayer

One of the words people in the church use to define what they do when they pray is the word “petition.” It means “asking for something.” It’s what most of us think prayer is for, a way to ask God for something. And it is that—as well as many other things.

It is possible to feel comfortable asking God for anything at all, no matter how trivial. Most people consider prayer to be a matter of some significance since it is the way frail, limited, and imperfect human beings call on the all-powerful, infinite, and perfect God. Therefore, we assume, prayer should be used for important matters only.

## Taking a Glimpse

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).*

## Talking with God

When I talk to You like this, Father,  
what am I supposed to say?

I have the feeling that when people pray,  
most of what they do is ask You for things.

Is that okay?

It must be.

After all, You said we should ask and  
You’re the One who has everything  
there is to give.

So it simply makes sense to ask  
You for the things we need  
instead of asking anyone else.  
(Notice I just said “things we  
need” but what was in my mind  
was things I want.)

There is a difference, isn’t there?  
One seems religious and the other  
seems not necessarily religious.  
Is it possible for me, child of Yours  
that I am, to tell the difference  
between things I need and things  
I want?

I’m sure that You know which is which.

So, is it necessary that I know?  
(I sense that it is.)

Maybe the clue is in those two special  
words in Your invitation—

“with thanksgiving.” I know it  
would make a difference in the way  
that I ask if I did so with the  
awareness of all that You’ve already  
given. I think it also would make a  
difference in what I ask for  
if I realized that almost all I have  
consists of things I never asked  
for, but that You gave me anyway.

My needs should be simple:  
food, clothing, shelter, other  
people. Your forgiveness,  
Your presence.

That is to say—all You’ve  
already provided.

My list of wants should have  
those same things at the top.  
Then I’ll be genuinely praying for  
“Thy will” to be done  
in me. I will be wanting  
the same things You want.  
And I’ll be able to thank You for  
them because they’ll be the things  
You’ve already provided.

And that’s why I don’t have to worry, isn’t it?

## Reflecting on Prayer

Certain kinds of prayer are obvious, such as a large group of people standing side by side in a church on Sunday morning, reciting or reading in unison some words addressed to God.

Equally obvious as prayer is a child kneeling beside a bed, hands folded, eyes closed.

Not so obvious is a man in a doctor's office waiting for the doctor to come back with some test results; or a lady in a garden, whistling a hymn softly as she pulls weeds; or a hiker in the back country pausing to look across a valley to a waterfall shrouded in mist and feeling calmed by the beautiful sight.

## Taking a Glimpse

*"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer"* (Psalm 19:14).

I've noticed, Father, that some people  
fold their hands when they pray  
and some don't.  
Some fold their arms;  
some clasp their hands behind  
their back;  
some put a hand to their eyes.

I've seen pictures of people  
waving their arms  
or just lifting them as if something  
from heaven was about to fall into  
their upturned hands.  
Some people close their eyes;  
some kneel.

All of that probably means  
that what I do with my hands  
or my eyes  
doesn't really make much difference  
(unless I had a good reason  
to pray with a certain gesture).

If it helps me concentrate—  
concentrate on You—  
then it's good to do.  
If it's a way to get noticed,  
then it's probably not good to do.

Some people pray out loud—  
in church, for instance,  
and before they eat (and  
sometimes after, too).  
Children are taught to pray  
when they go to bed.

All of that is obvious to somebody  
watching. But the psalm writer  
mentioned "thoughts"  
and that made me wonder.  
Can a prayer have no words?  
Can I simply think of things  
and be praying?

I need to find a time, Father,  
when I can do that;  
think—  
meditate—  
consider—  
sense Your presence—  
listen.

Do You still hear me  
when I can't find the words?  
I haven't said "Thee" or "Thou"  
or "Thy" or "Thine"  
in a long time.  
My grammar isn't perfect,  
my sentences incomplete

(I start one and then rush off  
to start another one that the first  
one suggested to me).  
A father understands when a child has  
something to say  
but doesn't know how to say it.  
With words, a thought, a pleasant feeling,  
I'll talk to You, Father.

It doesn't matter how.  
What matters is that  
You're listening.

## Reflecting on Prayer

When Christians get together to worship, they find comfort and strength in their relationships with each other. It's a good feeling to be surrounded by people who accept the same truths, experience the same failings, try with the same mixed results to love God and each other better each day. When such a group prays together, they express a common need.

At the same time, a group of God's people praying together is still a collection of individuals. Although they may all say the same words at the same instant, each of them is making a personal contact with his or her Father. That personal experience can happen in a group setting or it can be something that comes in a private moment when only God is around.

## Taking a Glimpse

*"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:6).*

## Talking with God

In some ways, talking with You  
is a personal thing.  
No one else can do what I might  
want done;  
no one else is responsible for  
giving me whatever I'm  
thankful for;  
no one else has on his or her mind  
what's on mine.

I understand why Jesus said  
it's a good idea to pray in private.  
The opposite of that  
would be to show off,  
to let other people think I'm much  
more holy than they are  
(or more holy than they thought  
I was) because of the way I openly  
talk to You.

But I notice that even Your  
Son, Jesus, tried to get away  
from it all to be by Himself  
and talk with You privately.

If I manage to do it right,  
there doesn't necessarily  
have to be a focus or even  
a progression  
in what I think or say.  
My mind can wander  
from subject  
to subject and back again.  
All of it is an experience of being  
close to You.  
That's what prayer is.



## Taking a Glimpse

*“My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the Lord” (Psalm 26:12).*

## Talking with God

So is what happens in church,  
where they pray together  
out loud without showing off.  
It seems something very nice to do.  
I listen to them, sometimes,  
and I notice they pray for others a lot.  
Even the ones who aren't there—  
*especially* the ones who aren't there.

Together they seem to consider  
what individually they might not  
have considered—  
because they didn't know that  
somebody is sick,  
somebody is about to die,  
there are lonely people around,  
there are people around who have  
given up, old people who are  
poor, old people who are

frightened, families with problems,  
families happy about  
weddings,  
anniversaries,  
“thank yous” of a dozen kinds  
to be given—  
all of which is not to mention  
prayers for peace and  
for wise leaders.

It's just the opposite of selfish,  
not at all showing off.

Praying together is a demonstration  
of care;  
one of the values in it, I suppose,  
is everyone's confident assumption  
(a correct one)  
that You care, too.

## Reflecting on Prayer

God is in control of all that happens. This is not the same thing as saying that God makes everything happen. He is the author of good things, not of evil. It is God who can make something good come out of something evil.

He brings good out of evil in His response to our prayers for help. His answer may not come in a flash of light and a loud roll of thunder. Instead, He may respond to our petition for help and deliverance from evil by strengthening us to trust in Him so to endure whatever comes our way.

## Taking a Glimpse

*“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).*

## Talking with God

There's still a problem, Father.  
Based on my own experience—  
and from what I've heard and seen  
in other people's lives—  
I'm not sure praying really works.

Don't get me wrong.  
I realize (thankfully)  
that You've given me a lot  
of things I asked for  
(without my deserving them)  
and many things I never asked for  
and many things I didn't know  
I needed.

That's not the problem.  
It's what I asked for,  
but never got.  
I assume You heard  
and cared,  
but chose not to let me have  
whatever it was.

Are You telling me to be patient?  
Children don't do that very well.

But who am I to be telling You the schedule.  
I sense it should be enough  
to be able to ask and to do so  
with the understanding  
about "Thy will," etc.  
If it is not Your will that I have  
what I asked for,  
then give me patience  
and keep me trusting in You.  
And yet—

I wonder why, Father.  
By this point in our relationship,  
I don't think it's presumptuous  
to ask "why?"

Children ask that all the time.  
And their parents, their teachers  
(and their God)  
always find it hard to word an answer  
in a way that a child  
can understand.

That's how I see Your answer to  
St. Paul,  
"*My grace is all you need.*"  
(That's a better answer than "because.")  
It's true, even though  
I still ask "why?"  
Your grace is all I need.  
It should be enough to know  
You love me,  
and that Your loving me  
is demonstrated in my possessing  
all I need  
and that being forgiven  
enables me to forgive others  
I know.

It should be enough to know You  
will raise the dead  
and that the resurrection  
is the one thing that will help me  
when I die.  
"*Your grace is all I need.*"  
It's strong because it comes from a  
father and gives hope to a child—me.

## Reflecting on Prayer

Prayer begins with God. If He did not exist, there would be neither a reason to pray nor any hope of being heard. Prayer also ends with God. Once we have committed ourselves to His will, the matters about which we pray are out of our hands.

God has anticipated every need we encounter in this life and provided a means of satisfying that need. In some cases that satisfaction of need can come through the created order—for example, plants and animals providing us with food. In other cases, the satisfying of a need comes through acts of kindness and help performed by God’s people. Understanding how God answers prayer, then, can be a matter of knowing where to look for His response. Beyond the petitions for help we should sense the deeper dimension of prayer, the process by which we declare our dependence on God and express our trust that His intentions toward us are only good. That declaration is a confession that He is our Father and that we are His children.

## *The Lord's Prayer*

It is in that spirit we can pray for all things through the prayer You taught us to pray:

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done on earth  
as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses as we  
forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil,  
For Thine is the kingdom  
and the power  
and the glory  
forever and ever.  
Amen.

## *Conclusion*

In Psalm 8 God led the writer to pen that He, God, had ordained (designed, given as a gift) praise to silence the foe and the avenger. For when we are praising God, Satan cannot speak.

Prayer is communion with God. The value of prayer is prayer! To ask if prayer works is to misunderstand the nature of the experience. It’s like asking, “Does love work?” or “What do you get out of talking to the one you love?”

In our conversations with God, we need not be preoccupied with the logistics, language, and organization of our concerns. We need only speak to God with absolute candor and a total lack of inhibition. Prayer is an invitation to speak to the One who loves us beyond measure about anything and everything in our lives, in any way and in every way, without the least fear of God’s rejection of us or a diminishment in God’s compassion for us.

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