

A pre-written prayer is any prayer that has been written before being spoken to God. This can include prayers such as: The Psalms, other prayers found in the Bible like The Lord's Prayer, prayers written by Christians in centuries past, or even the prayer you typed up on your phone before Life Group because you didn't want to forget anything.

People have a tendency to think of the practice of praying pre-written prayers as unheartfelt. They imagine a congregation of people mindlessly reciting words from a bulletin, all while totally disengaged from God. While it is possible for these types of prayers to be less than heartfelt at times, that doesn't mean that they are always lacking sincerity. Just because somebody else wrote the words doesn't mean that you don't feel exactly the same way. Sometimes you can see or hear a prayer and think, "That describes my thoughts and feelings exactly." Why would you not pray that prayer to God?

Why Use Pre-Written Prayers?

God has given us prayers to pray in Scripture.

The Psalms, the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13), and the prayers of the apostle Paul (Eph 1:15-21; 3:14-21; Col 1:9-14; 2 Thes 1:11-12) are just some of the recorded prayers in Scripture that are for the church.

Written Prayers from Scripture and church history connect us to the universal church.

Praying prayers that Christians have been praying for centuries helps remind us that we are not the only Christians in the world. When we pray a common prayer like The Lord's Prayer, we are praying to God in unity with Christians across the world, the reformers, the church fathers, the apostles, and Jesus himself.

Prayer can benefit from careful planning and structure. Preachers approach the weekly worship service with at least something planned for that particular gathering. They have prayed, studied the Scriptures, and have considered what they plan to communicate to the congregation. Why not consider prayer the same way? If using sermon notes is helpful, surely using prayer notes can be too.

They are beautiful & theologically rich. Many pre-written prayers are much more beautifully written than what we could come up with on the spot. A lot of them are even written as poetry with layers and layers of meaning and theology. We can learn and memorize good theology through scripture informed pre-written prayers.

Sometimes we don't know what to say. Have you ever began to talk to God and realized you didn't really have much to say? You may have thought, "I want to pray, but I just can't think of what I should be praying." Pre-written prayers teach us what other people have prayed, giving us ideas for what we can pray in the future.

Sometimes we don't know how to say what we want to say. Sometimes we don't know what to say to God, other times we are thinking or feeling things that are just too difficult to communicate. In these situations, it can be helpful to find a pre-written prayer that expresses what we are feeling.

They teach us how to pray. The way we pray is shaped by others. You may not notice it, but if you pray with someone long enough, you will likely start to pray like them. People from the same church background tend to pray alike because they hear and mimic each other. In a similar way, pre-written prayers help us develop our "prayer language."

How You Can Start

Choose a psalm from the book of Psalms. A good place to start may be Psalm 8, 51, or 139. Don't feel like you need to paraphrase anything. Make the psalmist's words your words and speak the psalm to God. You can also try praying a prayer written by Christians in centuries past. Below is a puritan prayer that gave it's name to the book *The Valley of Vision*, a collection of puritan prayers and devotions.

The Valley of Vision

Lord, High and Holy, Meek and Lowly,
Thou hast brought me to the valley of vision,
 where I live in the depths but see thee in the heights;
 hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold thy glory.

Let me learn by paradox
 that the way down is the way up,
 that to be low is to be high,
 that the broken heart is the healed heart,
 that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,
 that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,
 that to have nothing is to possess all,
 that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
 that to give is to receive,
 that the valley is the place of vision.

Lord, in the daytime stars can be seen from deepest wells,
 and the deeper the wells the brighter thy stars shine;

Let me find thy light in my darkness,
 thy life in my death,
 thy joy in my sorrow,
 thy grace in my sin,
 thy riches in my poverty,
 thy glory in my valley.