

... *You do not have, because you do not ask. (James 4:2)*

"It's not about rules, but a relationship!" Those were the words spoken by one student to another student at a camp I attended a few years ago. She continued her theme passionately: "No one *ever* grew close to God by depending upon a list of do's and don'ts. You must *know* God through Jesus! If people just attempt to follow the 'rules' thinking that 'checking the boxes' will produce righteousness, they will only find more distance because they are trying to make themselves right with God by their own power."

Later I approached the student and mentioned that she seemed very passionate about the topic. She responded, "I tried for too long to make myself right with God by just following the rules; when I truly met Jesus, I found out what a relationship means."

Our standing with God is based upon a relationship with Christ, not upon a list of rules to check. But we must understand that our prayer lives operate through a relationship, not rules. Too often, we can make prayer a dead, mechanical thing instead of an opportunity to speak to the living God.

When we go before God in prayer, we ask him to work, to bless, to move, to respond and to answer in some way. When we ask, there are some biblical guidelines we are given concerning prayer. These considerations cannot be approached as "rules," but are indications of our relationship with God.

When you pray...

Ask in Jesus' name (for his will to be done, by his power, for his purposes and for his glory). – *1 John 5:14-15 And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.*

John 14:13-14 "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

Ask in the Spirit and ask with careful consideration (think about what you are praying and surrender your mind and will to the Holy Spirit). – *1 Corinthians 14:15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.*

Ask while abiding in Christ (remain connected to him in obedience, prayer and his Word). – John 15:7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Ask in faith. - Mark 11:22-24 And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

Ask persistently. - Ephesians 6:18 Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

Ask with the right motives. - James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Prayer prompt: As you consider your prayers for yourself and others, have you been praying "through a relationship," or "by the rules?" Take some time and ask God to direct your heart, mind and desires deeper into a relationship with Christ before you pray for your needs and the needs of others today.

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." – Matthew 7:7-8

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"
– Matthew 7:11

Prayer should not be regarded as a duty which must be performed, but rather as a privilege to be enjoyed, a rare delight that is always revealing some new beauty.

– E.M. Bounds