THE QUESTION

Is there evidence that Christians in the first and second centuries prayed to God?

Asked by a THF member on June 26, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 7 numbered quotations · the 34 early Christian passages and 88 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/is-there-evidence-that-christians-in-the-first-and-second-centuries-prayed

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

Yes. Writers from the first two centuries show Christians praying to God often. Hermas prays and confesses his sins to the Lord, Polycarp prays for two hours before his arrest, and apologists tell rulers that Christians pray for persecutors and for the government. Prayer to God runs through all of these early sources.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
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SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 7

Hermas knelt and confessed his sins to God

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In The Shepherd, Hermas describes his own habit of prayer. He fasts and prays to the Lord, kneels, and confesses his sins to God, and he says he had done this before. Prayer here is a normal, repeated part of his life, not a one-time event.

1

"I had often fasted and prayed to the Lord that He would show me the revelation which He had promised to show me through that old woman."

later in the same passage

"But when I came back to myself and called to mind the glory of God, I took courage, bent my knees, and again confessed my sins to God, as I had done before."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 1, page 5 Read it in the library ›

POINT 2 OF 7

Hermas prayed for others and for God's glory

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Hermas does not pray only for himself. He asks the Lord to give repentance to straying believers so that God's name would be glorified, and he gives thanks. When afraid, he calls on the Lord to rescue him.

2

"I prayed that He might strengthen me, and give repentance to all His servants who were going astray, so that His great and glorious name might be glorified, because He had graciously shown me His marvels."

later in the same passage

"I began to weep, and to call on the Lord to rescue me from it."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 2, page 5 Read it in the library ›

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POINT 3 OF 7

Polycarp prayed for two hours before arrest

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The account of Polycarp's martyrdom says that when soldiers came for him, he asked for an hour to pray. He prayed so long and so fully that those listening were amazed, and some regretted coming to arrest him.

3

> "When they granted him leave, he stood and prayed, full of the grace of God, so that he could not stop for two full hours, to the astonishment of those who heard him, such that many began to repent that they had come against such a godly and venerable old man."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Polycarp,** *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (c. 100–155 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Christians prayed for those who persecuted them

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Aristides tells the king that Christians pray for the Greeks who mistreat them, asking that they repent. When one of them turns, he confesses to God. This shows prayer to God for enemies and prayer of confession.

4

> "For their part, they offer prayers that these people may repent of their error. And when it happens that one of them has repented, he is ashamed before the Christians of the works he has done."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Aristides,** *Apology* 17 (c. 125–140 AD) **Source 10, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 7

Christians prayed for rulers and the empire

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Athenagoras tells the emperors that Christians pray for their government and their reign. He links this to living a peaceful and quiet life, which echoes Paul's call to pray for kings.

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5

"For who deserves to receive what they ask more than those who, like us, pray for your government?"

later in the same passage

"This is also for our benefit, so that we may live a peaceful and quiet life and may ourselves readily do all that is commanded of us."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Athenagoras,** *A Plea for the Christians* 37 (c. 170–190 AD) **Source 13, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

A letter describes soldiers kneeling in prayer

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

A letter printed with Justin's First Apology, written in the emperor's name, says Christians in the army threw themselves on the ground and prayed for the whole army. Whatever one thinks of the letter, it pictures Christians known for prayer.

6

"Throwing themselves on the ground, they prayed not only for me but for the entire army, that we might be saved from the current thirst and hunger."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 11, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Ignatius asked churches to pray for him

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Ignatius, on his way to Rome in chains, hopes to be made complete through the prayers of the Ephesian Christians. This shows believers praying for one another, here in a later expanded form of his letter.

7

"For He is my hope; He is my boast; He is my never-failing riches, because of whom I carry these bonds from Syria to Rome, these spiritual jewels, in which may I be perfected through your prayers, and become a partaker of the sufferings of Christ, and have fellowship with Him in His death, His resurrection from the dead, and His everlasting life."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 7, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages show that early Christians prayed, but they give few full prayer texts from this period.
- The Ignatius passage comes from a later expanded version of his letter, and the emperor's letter with Justin's Apology may not be original to Justin.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 34 early Christian passages and 88 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–34, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 35–62, in Bible order), then 60 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *34 passages from 13 writers*

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 1–3*

1 *Shepherd* **Quote 1, page 2** vision which I saw, my brothers, was of the following kind. I had often fasted and prayed to the Lord that He would show me the revelation which He had… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Shepherd* **Quote 2, page 2** ten furlongs from the public road. The district is one rarely traveled. As I walked alone, I prayed to the Lord to complete the revelations He had made to me… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Shepherd* (1885 English; on point 1) not cease to make the request of your soul, and you will obtain it. But if you grow weary and waver in your request, blame yourself… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 4–7*

4 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (1885 English; on point 7) “pray ye without ceasing in behalf of other men… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (1885 English; on point 7) “pray ye without ceasing in behalf of other men… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *Epistle to the Romans* (1885 English; on point 7) “Christ for me, that by these instruments I may be found a sacrifice [to God… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “I attain to this, so that I may be found in the lot of the Christians of Ephesus, who have always had intercourse with the apostles by the power of… [continues online] **read ›**

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Polycarp, *c. 100–155 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "on their giving him leave, he stood and prayed, being full of the grace of God, so that he could not cease for two full hours, to the astonishment of… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Epistle to the Philippians* (1885 English) the widows to be discreet as respects the faith of the Lord, praying continually… [continues online] **read ›**

Aristides, *c. 125–140 AD · source 10*

10 *Apology* 17 **Quote 4, page 3** shameful acts with males, and with a mother and a sister and a daughter, in turn accuse the Christians of their monstrous impurity. But the Christians are righteous and good… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 11–12*

11 *First Apology* **Quote 6, page 4** "indeed we saw; and I was confined by this vast host, having only a battalion composed of the first, tenth, double, and marine legions with me. Assessing my situation and… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Dialogue with Trypho* (1885 English; on point 4) "all of us pray for you, and for all men, as our Christ and Lord taught us to do, when He enjoined us to pray even for our enemies, and… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · sources 13–14*

13 *A Plea for the Christians* 37 (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 4** "who are more deserving to obtain the things they ask, than those who, like us, pray for your government, that you may, as is most equitable, receive the kingdom, son… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *A Plea for the Christians* 11 (1885 English; on point 4) "to pray for those who plot against their lives… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 15*

15 *Against Heresies: Book II* (1885 English) "directing her prayers to the Lord, who made all things, in a pure, sincere, and straightforward spirit, and calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, she has been… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 16–18*

16 *On Exhortation to Chastity* 10 a man feels when he happens to be deprived of his wife. He savors spiritually. If he is making prayer to the Lord, he is near heaven. If he is… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *On Prayer* 9 (1885 English) "wonder? God alone could teach how he wished Himself prayed to… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *On Prayer* 29 "what has God, who requires it, ever denied to prayer that comes from spirit and truth? We read, and hear, and believe, what mighty proofs of its power there are… [continues online] **read ›**

Early Liturgies, *c. 200–400 AD · source 19*

19 *Divine Liturgy of St. Mark* 1 (1885 English) "Sovereign and Almighty God, the Father of our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ, we pray and beseech You to defend in Your good mercy our most holy and blessed… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 20*

20 *Against Celsus* 26 "Our duty is to pray to the Most High God alone, and to the Only-begotten, the First-born of the whole creation, and to ask Him, as our High… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 21–26*

21 *Treatises* (1885 English) "4:2 teaching, that is, and showing that those are able to obtain from God what they ask, whom God sees to be watchful in their prayer… [continues online] **read ›**

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22 *Epistles* And the Lord Himself also, the teacher of our discipline and the pattern of our example, often prayed watchfully, as we read in the Gospel: "He went out into a… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *Treatises* (1885 English) “therefore we Christians, who in our prayer begin to call God our Father, pray also that God's kingdom may come to us… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *Treatises* “a peaceful, sincere, and spiritual prayer was pleasing to the Lord. In the same way, we also find that the apostles prayed with the disciples after the Lord's ascension… [continues online] **read ›**

25 *Treatises* (1885 English) “is a loving and friendly prayer to beseech God with His own word, to come up to His ears in the prayer of Christ… [continues online] **read ›**

26 *Treatises* (on point 1) Instead, he beat his breast and confessed the sins hidden within him, and he begged for the help of divine mercy. While the Pharisee was pleased with himself, this man… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 27–31*

27 *Apostolic Constitutions* without ceasing. Therefore, as Judith, most famous for her wisdom and well known for her modesty, prayed to God night and day for Israel, so also the widow who is… [continues online] **read ›**

28 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) “Let us still further beseech God through His Christ, and let us beseech Him on account of the gift which is offered to the Lord God, that the good God… [continues online] **read ›**

29 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) “But let him pray thus after the foregoing prayer, and say: O God Almighty, the Father of Your Christ, Your only begotten Son, give me a body undefiled, a heart… [continues online] **read ›**

30 *Apostolic Constitutions* But let the one who is to be baptized be free from all wrongdoing. Let him be one who has stopped practicing sin, a friend of God, an enemy of… [continues online] **read ›**

31 *Apostolic Constitutions* When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites. But as the Lord appointed us in the Gospel, pray like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your… [continues online] **read ›**

Arnobius, *c. 290–330 AD · sources 32–34*

32 *Against the Heathen* 1 (1885 English) “we adore in joint prayers; from Him we beg things just and honourable, and worthy of His ear… [continues online] **read ›**

33 *Against the Heathen* 4 (1885 English; on point 5) “meetings to be cruelly broken up, in which prayer is made to the Supreme God, peace and pardon are asked for all in authority, for soldiers, kings, friends, enemies, for… [continues online] **read ›**

34 *Against the Heathen* 1 (1885 English) “it should throughout the whole of life fall on bended knee, and offer supplication with never-ceasing prayers… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *28 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

35 **Matthew 6:9** Therefore pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. **read ›**

36 **Luke 6:12** In these days, he went out to the mountain to pray, and he continued all night in prayer to God. **read ›**

37 **Luke 18:1** He also spoke a parable to them to show that they must always pray and not give up, **read ›**

38 **Luke 24:53** and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen. **read ›**

39 **Acts 2:42** They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. **read ›**

40 **Acts 4:24** When they heard this, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said, “O Master, you are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them, **read ›**

41 **Acts 8:19** saying, “Give me this authority too, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” **read ›**

42 **Acts 10:2** a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave many alms to the people, and continually prayed to God. **read ›**

43 **Acts 10:4** He looked intently at the angel and was afraid, and said, “What is it, Lord?” The angel said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have gone up as a memorial before God. **read ›**

44 **Acts 11:26** When he found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they gathered with the church and taught a considerable multitude. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. **read ›**

45 **Acts 12:5** So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer was being made to God for him by the church. **read ›**

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46 **Acts 17:27** that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. **read ›**

47 **Romans 1:9** For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you, **read ›**

48 **Romans 10:1** Brothers, my heart's desire and my prayer to God is for Israel, that they may be saved. **read ›**

49 **Romans 15:30** Now I beg you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, **read ›**

50 **Romans 16:5** Greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first fruits of Achaia to Christ. **read ›**

51 **1 Corinthians 1:5** that in everything you were enriched in him, in all speech and all knowledge, **read ›**

52 **2 Corinthians 1:11** you also helping us by prayer, so that thanks may be given by many on your behalf for the gracious gift given to us through many people. **read ›**

53 **Ephesians 3:14** For this cause, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **read ›**

54 **Colossians 1:3** We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, always praying for you, **read ›**

55 **1 Thessalonians 3:11** Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. **read ›**

56 **1 Thessalonians 5:17** Pray without ceasing. **read ›**

57 **2 Thessalonians 1:11** To this end we also pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of the calling and fulfill every desire for goodness and work of faithfulness with power, **read ›**

58 **1 Timothy 2:1** Therefore I urge first of all that pleas, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, **read ›**

59 **1 Timothy 2:2** for kings and all who are in high places, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and reverence. **read ›**

60 **1 Timothy 2:8** Therefore I desire that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands without anger and dispute. **read ›**

61 **2 Timothy 1:3** I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience as my forefathers did, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day, **read ›**

62 **Hebrews 5:7** He, in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and petitions with strong crying and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *60 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Job 1:21 · 40:15

Psalms 44:21

Jeremiah 8:4 · 24:1 · 29:12

Matthew 5:44 · 6:6 · 6:21 · 6:32 · 7:7 · 11:12 · 21:9 · 21:22 · 22:39 · 26:55

Mark 12:17 · 12:42

Luke 2:14 · 6:27 · 19:15 · 21:3

Acts 3:1

Romans 2:7 · 6:3 · 6:8 · 8:5 · 14:8 · 15:24 · 16:7

1 Corinthians 7:5 · 15:32 · 15:52

2 Corinthians 7:1

Ephesians 4:1 · 4:4 · 6:11

Colossians 1:10 · 1:23

1 Thessalonians 2:12 · 4:16

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1 Timothy 4:15 · 5:5 · 6:7 · 6:10

2 Timothy 2:24

Titus 2:12

James 1:5 · 1:6 · 1:8

1 Peter 2:23 · 4:7

1 John 5:14

Revelation 9:3 · 11:7 · 12:3 · 13:1 · 17:8 · 20:6 · 22:2

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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THE END OF THIS STUDY