

TODAY IN THE WORD™

A ministry of Moody Bible Institute

Powerful Prayers

OF THE BIBLE



APRIL 2021

Your Personal Translator

From the President of Moody Bible Institute

“The groaning of the Holy Spirit on our behalf may be wordless but it is deep with meaning.”



Years ago, I was invited to a gathering of pastors in a remote village in Mozambique, Africa. About half of the

attendees spoke Portuguese; the other half spoke Swahili. I counted it a privilege to meet these brothers in Christ. But when they asked me to teach, I explained it wasn't possible. I didn't know their language. We were happy when God provided two translators who could repeat what I said in Portuguese and Swahili. The only word we all had in common was "Hallelujah!" Without those skilled linguists, I wouldn't have been able to effectively communicate. I needed them to interpret for me.

That's how it feels with prayer sometimes. We don't know how to communicate what is on our hearts to God. At times, it can feel like an effort to pray or we struggle for the right words. We may repeat a prayer we memorized as children, failing to fully express what is on our heart. The good news is that God has given us our own translator. The apostle Paul,

in Romans 8, explains that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness" (v. 26). Even when you fumble or mumble, the Holy Spirit says, "Hey, I've got this." Paul says that "the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God" (vv. 26–27).

Paul says the Spirit intercedes for us with "wordless groans" (v. 26). Groaning is filled with emotion and meaning. It reflects our brokenness. We long to be whole and full, and we groan to see that happen. The groaning of the Holy Spirit on our behalf may be wordless but it is deep with meaning. The Holy Spirit knows you better than you know yourself. And even more important, the Spirit knows the mind of God.

When you pray with the Spirit, you are sensitive to God's leading. You pray in a powerful way in line with the Word of God. Paul says when we pray with the intercession of the Spirit, we can "know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (v. 28). The Spirit will ask God the Father for things you don't even know you should ask for yourself. ■

God's Remedy for Anxiety

by Dr. John Koessler

*"Prayer is not our attempt to persuade God.
He knows our needs better than we do."*

We deal with anxiety in many ways: breathing techniques, massage, and physical exercise. But God has given us a remedy that may surprise us: prayer. Philippians 4:6–7 urges: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Anxiety is a reaction to the concerns we feel. Often these are focused on necessities: providing food and clothing for ourselves or our family (Matt. 6:25). Or we may feel uncertain of the future (Matt. 6:34). At its root, anxiety is the stress we feel when we are not in control. This may tempt us to try and use prayer to control our circumstances and ultimately, God Himself. We know it is impossible (and unnecessary) to do either. The key to prayer is not persuasiveness but faith. Prayer is the most effective cure for anxiety because it is based on the certainty

that God "knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt. 6:8).

Prayer is not our attempt to persuade God. He knows our needs better than we do. We cannot pressure God into granting our request or force Him to do anything. To begin with, we have no leverage. Besides, God is not unwilling. The one who clothes the flowers of the field in beauty and provides for the birds of the air is pleased to supply what we need as well (Matt. 6:25–33).

If the knowledge of the things we need and the power to provide them are in God's hands, why are our prayers even necessary? We pray because it is our privilege to ask. God, who already knows what we need, gives shape to our words instead of making them unnecessary (Matt. 6:9–13). We have been made in His image. By allowing us to put our requests into words, God grants us the dignity of treating us as His children (Matt. 7:7–11). Are you anxious today? Present your requests to God. ■

For Further Study

To learn more, read *Psalms for the Anxious Heart* by Becky Harling (Moody Publishers).

We hope these questions will help you consider (or discuss with others) what God is teaching you through this month's study of His Word. We've left a bit of room to write down your thoughts as well!

WEEK 1: Why is prayer so important in the life of a believer?

WEEK 2: How does prayer glorify God? (see April 4)

WEEK 3: D. A. Carson wrote, "We will not grow in prayer unless we plan to pray." Do you have a prayer plan? What might that look like for you?

WEEK 4: Identify one person's prayer in this month's study. What did you learn from it?

Want more questions? Check out the Go Deeper section on our website or app!

TODAY IN THE WORD™

Powerful Prayers of the Bible

*In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning
I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly. —Psalm 5:3*

If I am honest, I have an on-again, off-again relationship with prayer. I know prayer is something I need to do and most of the time it is something I want to do. But other times I wonder if it is working, or if I am even doing it right. I began looking at the prayers in the Bible and what I discovered was fascinating. I want to share some of that with you in this study on *Powerful Prayers of the Bible*. Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said, “Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.” It is my hope that prayer will change you too. Through this month’s study, we will:

- Examine the prayers of Jesus, kings, prophets, and Christ’s followers
- Learn patterns of prayer based on biblical examples
- Deepen our prayer lives by focusing on aspects of how to pray

Your devotional author,



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Teach Us to Pray

Read Matthew 6:5–13

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.—Matthew 6:6

Pastor David Platt says, “The primary purpose of prayer is not to get something, but to know Someone.” This month, as we focus on powerful prayers from the Bible, we want to learn how we may become better people of prayer. With all that is happening in our world and in our personal lives, it is important to examine and strengthen our prayer lives.

Oftentimes we forget that Jesus was not only a master teacher and miracle worker but also a master “pray-er.” Throughout the gospels, we see Jesus praying for others, with others, alone, and in nature. Luke tells us that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. His whole life was soaked in prayer (Luke 5:16).

In our text today, Jesus teaches His disciples that prayer begins with a humble heart and right attitude toward God and others (vv. 5–6). Unlike the religious elites, He tells His followers that their heavenly

Father answers the prayer of those who understand who they are in light of who God is. We must remember though, as Platt says, that the “reward” is not necessarily getting something, but knowing Someone (v. 6).

Jesus also taught His listeners that their prayer ought to be purposeful. Unlike the pagans who babble with many words, our prayers ought to be properly directed and honestly pronounced (vv. 7–8). Jesus gives a pattern of prayer for His listeners to follow that has come to be known today as the Lord’s Prayer (vv. 9–13). We will unpack this prayer later this month, but as we approach Good Friday, examine your own motives in prayer. Make it your aim not to seek things, but to get to know Him more.

► This month, make it a point to set aside a time and place for consistent prayer. Choose a quiet place where you will be able to silence your mind and quiet your soul so you can dialogue with your heavenly Father.

Pray with Us

Lord, as we study powerful prayers from the Bible, place our hearts in a proper posture before you. Teach us to pray with humility and honesty, and with ears tuned to your voice.

Not My Will

Read Matthew 26:36–46

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.—Matthew 26:41

After celebrating their Passover meal, Jesus and His disciples went to a garden called Gethsemane, which literally means “olive press.” The garden was located on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. Olives from the neighborhood were brought and crushed there producing oil for Jerusalem and the surrounding region. The name seems fitting since Jesus would be taken away from that garden. He would be crushed and His grace distributed not just to Jerusalem and the region, but to the whole world.

At Gethsemane, Jesus grieved because He knew what was going to happen. In part, He was distressed because He knew the physical horror that awaited Him (vv. 38–39). He also was exceedingly sorrowful because of the spiritual horror he was about to endure by standing in the place of guilty sinners and receiving their due punishment.

Jesus’ prayers at Gethsemane centered on these words: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be

taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (v. 39). He prayed this not as a request, because God the Father would never deny the Son any request. Rather, Jesus’ prayer signifies both the severity of what was about to take place and His acceptance of surrendering His life to accomplish the will of His Father.

Repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, the cup is a powerful picture of God’s wrath and judgement. Who better than Jesus could fully understand God the Father’s wrath and judgement? Jesus wasn’t necessarily afraid of physical death, but rather, He was anticipating the judgment of all humanity’s sin. Before Judas the betrayer showed up at Gethsemane, Jesus the Redeemer, because of His love for the world, resolved that God the Father’s will would be done (vv. 39, 42).

► Because Jesus received our judgement, you and I are counted innocent of our sin. Jesus surrendered His life for us. We too, ought to surrender our lives for Him.

Pray with Us

Father, thank you for all that you have suffered for us! Fill our hearts with ever-increasing gratitude. May we sincerely pray with Christ, “Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39).

Three Prayers from the Cross

Read Luke 23:44–49

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?—Mark 15:34

On the cross, Jesus was mostly silent. The excruciating pain He endured would have made it nearly impossible for Him to speak. Any utterance would have used the strength needed to pull himself up by His impaled hands and feet in order to take a breath. Therefore, the words Jesus spoke from the cross are significant. Among the seven expressions attributed to Jesus during His crucifixion, three were prayers to His heavenly Father.

His first words from the cross were a prayer. As the soldiers divided His clothes and cast lots, He cried out, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). We see that even in the midst of injustice and humiliation, Jesus prayed for His persecutors. The Roman soldiers were doing what they had known and taught. Their allegiance was to the emperor, and they cared little about the Jewish scuffles of the day. However, we would later see that Jesus’ prayer is answered, as the centurion overseeing the execution praised and confessed

that Jesus was indeed a righteous man, the Son of God (Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47).

Jesus’ second prayer, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34) is a recitation of Psalm 22. Many scholars believe this is an indication of the only time in Jesus’ life when He was abandoned by the Father. Some scholars argue that this was the moment when the Son took upon Himself the sins of all humanity, and the Father turned from the presence of sin. Regardless of one’s interpretation, Jesus’ second prayer exemplifies the depth of His suffering on our behalf.

Jesus’ final utterance from the cross is also His third prayer, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Here, Jesus quotes Psalm 31:5 and announces to all His trust in His heavenly Father to raise Him from the dead. Just a few days later, He did!

► Take time today to read and reflect on Christ’s prayers from the cross. How are His prayers meaningful to you during this Holy Week?

Pray with Us

We are sobered by this picture of Christ’s suffering on our behalf. We recognize your wrath against sinners, Lord God. Teach us the true weight of sin so that we may better grasp the significance of grace.

Jesus Prays for Himself

Read John 17:1–5

Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.—John 17:1

“He has risen! He has risen, indeed!” This is how many believers around the globe will greet one another on this Resurrection Day. But this is more than a greeting, it is a proclamation of what happened to the Savior of the world who surrendered His life for you and me. Because of the resurrection, God the Son is glorified, just as He glorified the Father.

Our text today is the beginning of what is historically known as the High Priestly Prayer. Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father for Himself to be glorified. He is not praying from an egotistical disposition for meaningless praise. Rather, Christ’s prayer is for Him to be glorified so that He could glorify the Father (v. 1). Jesus is clear that His life, death, and resurrection are to make the Father known.

We learn from Jesus’ prayer that His priority was to use every opportunity He had to glorify God the Father. What does it mean to “glorify” someone or something? The

word can take on several meanings but at its core, “glorify” means to magnify, celebrate, render excellent, and honor something. It is quite easy to be a witness of glorification today. Oftentimes, we glorify actors and actresses for their performance on the stage. Or we glorify athletes on the field after a play. We glorify our kids and grandkids after an achievement.

However, the glory we give to God ought to be vastly different. Christ glorified His Father by being obedient to His Father’s will. He surrendered His life to the will of His Father and as a result, we are given a new life in Him. We, too, ought to glorify our Heavenly Father by listening and being obedient to His will.

► What things or people in your life are you glorifying? Are they receiving more attention and praise than your Heavenly Father? This Easter Sunday, ask yourself how you can bring glory to the Father.

Pray with Us

Father, we glorify you above all! You are the only one worthy of praise. Grant us opportunities to spread the light of your Word throughout the world, bringing glory to your name.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

Read John 17:6–19

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.—John 17:15

I do not know how all the components of my smart phone work, but I do know this: if I forget to charge it, and the battery is dead, nothing will work. Jesus knew His disciples would need to work together after He was gone. Their success would depend on whether or not they were constantly plugged into the power source: Jesus. After He prayed for Himself to glorify the Father, He prayed for His disciples.

Jesus prayed for their protection against the evil one (v. 15). We are reminded in Jesus' prayer that a spiritual battle is being fought between Christ's disciples and the enemy. After Jesus' departure from this world, He understood that the disciples' unity would be under attack. Therefore, He prayed that they be kept as one, just as He and the Father were one (v. 11). His prayer reflects His deep desire for His disciples to overcome the principalities of this

world by unifying together. Their success in transforming the world depended heavily on the Lord enabling them to work as one.

Then Jesus closed this portion of His prayer by praying for His disciples to be "truly sanctified" (v. 19). The Greek word for "sanctify" can also be translated as "set apart for sacred use" or "make holy." Christ uses this word three times in the last three sentences emphasizing His plea that they are to be used by God for the mission of the world (v. 18). As Jesus often does, He gives His life as an example of what a sanctified life looks like by going to the cross in fulfillment of His mission to the world (v. 19).

► Living on mission in the world is a demanding and challenging task. One of the hardest parts is simply identifying the tactics the enemy uses to get us off track. Pray to clearly see your mission field and for God's protection from the enemy.

Pray with Us

Dear God, you have placed us in this world to fulfill your mission. Guide our every decision to align with your will. Guard us from the attacks, the temptations, and the lies of the enemy. You are greater!

Jesus Prays for Us

Read John 17:20–26

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one.—John 17:20–21

There is an old fable about a man who, at the hour of his death, gathered his sons around him. He gave them a bunch of sticks, tied into a bundle, and asked the oldest son to try and break them. The son struggled to break the sticks in half, but failed. One by one his brothers failed as well. Then the father untied the bundle and handed them each one stick, asking them to break it. Easily they snapped the limbs in half. The moral of this lesson? In unity is strength.

In today's prayer, Jesus prayed for the unity of believers. It is hard to imagine, but just hours before Jesus' betrayal, trial, and crucifixion He was thinking about . . . you. In verse 20 of our text, He transitions from praying for His disciples to praying for all believers. His one request is that believers everywhere may be one.

When believers from all different races and ethnicities, ages and backgrounds are united, the world will begin to believe that Jesus

is indeed the Christ (vv. 21, 23).

Jesus goes on to pray for believers to not only be tolerant with one another but also to be connected and attached to one another, just as the Father is to the Son (v. 22). Jesus imagines that the unity among believers is as strong as the unity that is within the Trinity.

Jesus' prayer crescendos with His desire that we will one day be with Him. Knowing what He was about to endure, His final thoughts were about us being unified with other believers and one day being united with Him (v. 24). Christ's prayer for us was that we would be completely committed to being united with Jesus and one another on both sides of eternity.

► This week, have a conversation with a Christian who is different from you. Maybe you differ in ethnicity, political persuasion, or a socio-economic class. Learn something new about this brother or sister in Christ, and pray together for unity.

Pray with Us

Father, we grieve that sometimes we elevate the differences between believers above our shared relationship to you. Grant us a servant's heart to strengthen ties with others—particularly those who are different from us.

Hannah's Prayer

Read 1 Samuel 2:1–10

There is no one holy like the LORD, there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. —1 Samuel 2:2

Has there ever been a time when you pleaded with the Lord? “God, if you do this, then I promise to . . .” Sometimes God looks at our life and chooses to answer “Yes.” In our text today, we turn to the Old Testament and read a powerful prayer, spoken by a woman named Hannah.

Although Hannah’s husband, Elkanah, loved her more than his other wife, she could not bear a child. Scripture tells us that God closed Hannah’s womb (1:5). But Hannah’s desire became so strong that she promised that, if God would grant her a child, she would surrender him to Yahweh (1:11). God answered her plea. In response, she indeed dedicated Samuel to the Lord and handed him over to Eli the priest (1:28). What tremendous courage it must have taken Hannah to surrender her answered prayer over to someone else.

The prayer we read today is very personal to Hannah. She cries, “my

heart . . . my horn . . . my mouth” (2:1). We see that it was Yahweh, not Samuel, who was the ultimate foundation of her joy and strength. For Hannah, there was no one like the Lord (v. 2). Safety, comfort, and justice are found in Him (v. 3).

Throughout her prayer, Hannah praises the Lord for reversing the conditions of people who rightly follow Him. From the dead they are given life, from the grave they are raised up, from the ash heap they are lifted (vv. 6–8). Her prayer ends with an eye to the future. At this time in Israel’s history they had no king, but she prophetically proclaims Israel’s future king, and the future King of kings, Jesus Christ (v. 10). Hannah’s prayer reminds us that God is in control and that He has a grand plan.

► Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to the things God has blessed you with and then take this time to give Him the adoration He deserves.

Pray with Us

We praise you for the daily blessings that bring us joy. We adore you for the miraculous ways you have proven your faithfulness. We glorify you for the work you have done in our lives that we do not yet understand.

David's Prayer (Part 1)

Read 1 Chronicles 29:1–13

Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.—1 Chronicles 29:11

Groundbreaking and ribbon-cutting ceremonies are ways we celebrate and thank the many people who paved the way for a new business or building. As God's people prepared to build the Temple in Jerusalem, King David's words and prayer taught his people, and us, that a proper perspective produces praise.

At this point in his life, David's boyish good looks had most likely turned to wrinkles. His ruddy red hair had turned gray. He used to be able to run for miles, now he had to stop to catch his breath when climbing a flight of stairs. One last task he had before leaving this world was to build a place of worship for God. So he drew up plans for a magnificent temple. But the Lord informed him that, because he was a warrior, He wanted someone else to build it. So David rolled up the blueprints, gave them to his son, and then addressed the whole assembly with a prayer to God.

In this powerful prayer, David proclaims that the Lord deserves

praise because He is our eternal God (v. 10), who reigns with greatness and power. We have become so accustomed to the things God created that we often focus our attention on human accomplishments. But God created everything, and therefore, everything in heaven and in earth is His (v. 11). God's creation displays His majesty, splendor, and power.

For instance, just ten seconds of the sun's power, which God created, have enough energy to power the entire world for 100 years. God is head over all and the ruler of all things (vv. 11–12). David recognized Yahweh's character and attributes and praised Him unashamedly until his last breath. He had a proper perspective of God which produced praise, and his praise continues to echo today.

► Follow David's example and reflect on God's greatness. As you do, praise God by giving thanks for who He is.

Pray with Us

Father, with joyful humility we recognize that there is nothing we can offer you that we did not receive from you. We are awestruck by your majesty, love, justice, and mercy. To your name be all glory!

David's Prayer (Part 2)

Read 1 Chronicles 29:14–20

Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. — 1 Chronicles 29:14

In his *New York Times* bestselling book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey tells people to imagine what they want said at their funeral. When we think about how we want to be remembered we should begin with the end in mind. Did you know that your life will shape your legacy? How we live will determine how people will remember us. And how we steward the things God has given us will influence the way people think of us long after we are gone. King David never read Covey's book, but he knew that the life he leads would ultimately shape his legacy. It is no wonder then that in one of his final prayers he declares before the Lord that everything comes directly from God.

David recognized that all of the wealth the Israelites were able to provide for the building of the Temple was actually from God's hands (vv. 14, 16). This raw, humble sentiment is

the bedrock of biblical stewardship. Through David's prayer, he teaches his son, his people, and us that God is beyond generous. The right response on our part is to be generous. David also reminds his people that even though they were living in the land, they were still "foreigners and strangers," and that the only right to the land was through God's provision and sovereignty. David said that at the heart of generosity ought to be integrity and honesty. For him, the motive dictated the motion (v. 17).

David concludes by getting to the heart of the matter which is ultimately a matter of the heart. He requested that the Lord help his son's heart, and the Israelites' hearts, to be fixed on Yahweh.

► Look at your life and ask, "What is mine and what is the Lord's?" As you reflect, I hope you come to the similar conclusion David did, that everything comes from the Lord.

Pray with Us

Everything we have is from you, Father. As we teach our children to practice generosity, help them understand that everything we have and give belongs to you; we are the sons and daughters of a God who gives abundantly.

Solomon Prays for Wisdom

Read 1 Kings 3:1–15

Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.—1 Kings 3:9

Aristotle is quoted as saying, “Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.” However, better advice came from King Solomon, who wrote centuries earlier: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). In our text today, we see that Solomon knew he deeply needed wisdom from God because he knew himself *and* he feared the Lord.

Solomon was now king of Israel but had not yet finished building the Temple. Solomon, like other Israelites at the time, went to the most important high place in Gibeon to make sacrifices to the Lord (v. 4). While there, the Lord came to Solomon in a dream, saying, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you” (v. 5). Can you imagine what your reaction would be if God asked you that question? What would you ask for? Wealth? Healing? Longevity?

Solomon began his response by praising God: “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David.” Then he acknowledged the continued kindness God had shown

to him (v. 6). Solomon acknowledged the Davidic covenant was continuing to be fulfilled through him. But he also recognized his youthfulness and inexperience (v. 7). He was barely out of his teens when he took the throne so it is no surprise that he felt overwhelmed with the responsibilities of governing the nation.

Solomon continued and did not ask for wealth or a happy life but rather he gave a mature request, “Give your servant a discerning heart” (v. 9). The word *discerning* can also be translated “hearing” or “obedient.” Solomon was asking for the capacity to obey God’s law and distinguish between right and wrong (v. 9). He recognized that the best thing for him to do was to stay in step with the law of God. In return, God richly blessed him for humbling himself and seeking wisdom.

► We all need a little reminding to stay in step with the Spirit. So here is your reminder today, take this moment to pray and ask God for His wisdom and an obedient heart.

Pray with Us

Grant us your wisdom, Lord, to discern the false wisdom of the world. Give us hearts that follow you, love your Word, and delight in obeying you.

Solomon's Prayer at the Temple

Read 1 Kings 8:22–53

But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you.—1 Kings 8:27

There is nothing quite like completing a huge project, whether it is home renovation or an all-day feast. The feeling of accomplishment is satisfying. That's what Solomon and the Israelites experienced as they laid the last brick at the Temple project. The altars were assembled in all the right places. The ark was positioned perfectly in the holy of holies. The only thing left was Solomon's prayer of dedication to Yahweh.

In our text today, Solomon begins by acknowledging the matchlessness and faithfulness of the Lord (vv. 23–26). In his prayer, he emphasizes God's power and magnitude. The Israelites built a Temple for Yahweh, but there is no human-made structure that could possibly contain God's greatness (v. 27). Even so, Solomon prays that the people's supplications will be received by the ears and eyes of the Lord (vv. 28–30).

Solomon intercedes on behalf of the nation and reiterates their relationship to the Lord. Yahweh

would stand as the arbitrator of disputes between neighbors (vv. 31–32). He would be the One whom they would ask for mercy when the nation sinned, was defeated in battle, or when other atrocities came their way (vv. 33–37). Even while celebrating this magnificent Temple, Solomon's prayer emphasized the need for forgiveness. He prays for Israel's relationship with non-Jewish people (vv. 41–45), with a warning that foreshadowed the future exile (vv. 45–49).

Even though the Temple was built by human hands, Yahweh was the chief architect. Solomon's prayer reminded his people that all of them had sinned against God (vv. 35, 46–49). The good news is that God not only forgives sins but also delights in dwelling with His people (v. 50).

► When you pray with others in corporate prayer, make sure your heart, mind, and soul are echoing the words that are spoken. The Lord sees and listens to you, even if you aren't the one speaking.

Pray with Us

Father, help us understand the corporate nature of prayer. Teach us to pray in unity with our fellow believers and center our desires on the truth of your Word.

Jabez's Prayer

Read 1 Chronicles 4:9–10

Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my territory!—1 Chronicles 4:10

Born into poverty, Walt Disney grew up to create what he envisioned as the “happiest place on earth.” We all love to read stories about men and women who overcame hardship and went on to bless others. Even more, we can be encouraged to know that God can even use difficult things in our lives for His purpose and glory.

First Chronicles chapter 4 contains a genealogy list. However, the author breaks slightly to communicate to the reader that there was a man named Jabez, a descendant of Judah, who was “more honorable than his brothers” (v. 9). Jabez was held in high esteem by the Lord because of his ability to rely on God even in the midst of struggle and pain.

His name comes from the Hebrew word that sounds like *pain* and the author lets us know that his mother named him this because he was born in pain. Every mother will tell you that childbirth is painful. The

pain is a direct result of the Fall. The Lord said to Eve, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children” (Gen. 3:16). However, the pain from Jabez’s childbirth stuck with him and he lived a life of pain. In his prayer, Jabez asks God to “bless” him, “keep” him, and “free” him. His prayer is meant to exemplify the power and greatness of God. Jabez shows us that the name we are given or the circumstances we are born into do not define us or determine our destiny. What matters is that God is sovereign, and God is in control (v. 10).

► Are you in pain today? We have all been born into sin, cursed from birth, and live in a world of suffering, whether physical, spiritual, or emotional. But Jesus says, “Take heart, for I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Pray and ask God to deliver you today.

Pray with Us

We cry out to you in our pain. Lord, shelter us from despair, hold us back from hatred, and give us strong faith. Deliver us from evil and bless us, we pray.

Hezekiah's Prayer

Read 2 Kings 19:15–19

*What, then, shall we say in response to these things?
If God is for us, who can be against us?—Romans 8:31*

People love an underdog story, when a downtrodden person conquers great obstacles and transforms into a hero. In today's passage, Hezekiah is the underdog. Assyria is set on attacking the city of Judah. They have been ruthless with other cities they conquered, treating them like animals. Now they were fixed on the people of Judah. In fact, they were overly confident that they could defeat Judah. They sent Hezekiah a letter mocking Yahweh: "Do not let the god you depend on deceive you" (v. 10), inferring that they have defeated other countries and their gods did not save them. But the Assyrians underestimated Yahweh; they did not realize that He alone is God.

Hezekiah went to the Temple, symbolically laid the letter before God and prayed, "You alone are God" (v. 15), affirming God's sovereignty and His supremacy. He passionately pleaded for deliverance from his enemy. Pointing to the letter he said, "Listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God" (v. 16).

It is true Assyria had conquered other countries and had "thrown their gods into the fire" (v. 17), but Hezekiah rightly points out that those gods were "fashioned by human hands" (v. 18). Fourth-century bishop Athanasius of Alexandria suggests, "Instead of arming ourselves with swords, we ought to extend our hands in prayer." That is exactly what Hezekiah did.

Hezekiah went beyond requesting relief and rescue because he was also concerned about Yahweh's reputation. Therefore, Hezekiah prayed that through God's deliverance, "all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God" (v. 19). Hezekiah may have seemed like the underdog to the Assyrians, but God was always on his side, and if "God is for us, who can stand against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

► What seems to be standing against you today? I want to encourage you to write that obstacle down on paper, and, like Hezekiah, lay that down before the Lord, asking Him to rule.

Pray with Us

Almighty God, we bring before you the obstacles and fears we face, recognizing that you have already overcome the world. Grant us victory for the glory of your name!

Daniel's Prayer

Read Daniel 2:1–23

*Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.—Daniel 2:20*

Dreams are not something we talk about much in Christian circles. However, we do see in Scripture that at times the Lord has used dreams to teach people about Himself and to communicate His glory to others. In our text today, the Lord did just that to Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar, and the world.

For Daniel and his friends, the deck was stacked against them. King Nebuchadnezzar's request to interpret his dream was humanly impossible, and the punishment was absurd. So Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did what only they knew how to do, they prayed. Together they sought help from the "God of heaven." This title is used four times in this chapter and nowhere else in the book (vv. 18, 19, 37, 44). They needed knowledge for this mystery that could only come from an all-knowing God. While the pagan Babylonians worshiped the luminaries, the Israelites worship the God of heaven. God answered their prayers by revealing the mystery of

the dream to Daniel in a vision.

Daniel responded with a prayer of praise to Yahweh (vv. 20–23). His prayer begins by praising God for being eternal, omniscient, and all-powerful (v. 20). He emphasizes that God is sovereign over all political affairs and people and indeed the One who brings people in and out of power. Daniel recognizes that only God is the One capable to give revelation and wisdom by revealing "deep and hidden things" (v. 22).

Daniel was quick to give thanks and praise to the "God of my ancestors," for the wisdom he discerned (v. 23). The interpretation of the dream was nothing he did on his own or with the help of friends. Humanly speaking, it was impossible. But the God of heaven provided salvation for them.

► You may not be asked to interpret any dreams, but if you need wisdom and discernment today, pray to the God of heaven. The all-knowing God knows exactly what you should do.

Pray with Us

All-knowing God, we regularly face difficult decisions and confusing predicaments. We ask for your wisdom to help us make choices that honor you.

Questions & Answers

by Dr. Valencia Wiggins, Assistant Professor
and Field Chair of Counseling

Q Why do people suffer from insomnia when they seem to have a very safe and happy life? Does the Bible mention our need for sleep, and why it sometimes escapes us?

A Sleep is one of God's most precious gifts for our bodies. We need sleep for optimal health. In Genesis, God created a natural order to our lives by separating night from day (Gen. 1:3–4), and He even designated a day for rest (Gen. 2:2–3). After a solid night of rest, generally seven to nine hours, our bodies feel energized for a brand-new day. However, circumstances that occur during our hours of wakefulness may sometimes disrupt our restorative hours of sleep. Stressful life events (such as the pandemic), problems in relationships, changes in routine, positive and negative experiences, may impact our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

We see this throughout the Bible when kings could not sleep due to the weight of responsibility or life-changing decisions (Est. 6:1; Dan. 6:18; John 4:6). This is not a new problem, but is experienced by believers and unbelievers alike. At any point in our lives, unexpected circumstances have the potential to disrupt our peace of mind and our valuable sleep.

Q As a Christian, why am I not experiencing God's peace that will allow me to sleep?

A One of my favorite verses is, "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety" (Ps. 4:8). Yet, as a clinical psychologist, I have talked to many Christians who struggle with insomnia. They ask: Why am I experiencing sleepless nights if I have put my trust in God? First, let's look at the clinical understanding of this issue. Insomnia is a common sleep disorder that includes difficulty falling asleep, waking up too early, and/or difficulty maintaining sleep. Anyone at any age may experience insomnia.

Insomnia can be our bodies' way of telling us that something is wrong. One of the beautiful ways God designed our bodies includes signals that sound the alarm that something is happening to our physical well-being and needs attention. Insomnia is a signal that something is occurring in our life that is causing a physical response. And, when we experience a sleep disorder such as insomnia, this sleep loss has an impact on our physical, emotional, and mental health. Lack of sleep has been known to increase levels of anxiety and depression.

“At any point in our lives, unexpected circumstances have the potential to disrupt our peace of mind and our valuable sleep.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people experienced insomnia due to isolation, loneliness, limited exercise, anxiety, and depression. And we know that many times all of these factors are out of our physical control. Even when things seem peaceful and calm for a season, trials and events may occur at any moment to disrupt our routine and our sleep (James 1:2).

Q How can we, as Christians, develop a healthy and biblical relationship with sleep?

A God’s Word provides several beautiful examples of rest, even from the beginning of creation. For example, we see God modeling rest after He created heaven and earth in seven days. “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Gen. 2:3). So, what are healthy ways to cope with insomnia? How can you maintain a good night of sleep and restoration? There’s a term called “sleep hygiene” that hints at this good balance. Just like we take care of our daily needs, brush our teeth, or eat nutritious meals, we should take steps to improve our sleep health as well. Here are a few ways to practice “sleep hygiene”:

1. **Develop a sleep schedule.** Set your clock to get up at the same time every day, and go to bed the same time each night. Even if you cannot sleep, use this time to rest your body. Rather than trying to make yourself sleep, use the time to reflect on your day and God’s goodness (Gen. 2:2; Josh. 1:13–15; 23:1; Matt. 11:28–30).
2. **Establish a relaxing bedtime routine** and turn off your electronic devices for half an hour before you sleep. Use this time for prayer or Bible reading (Ps. 146; Isa. 26:3–4).
3. **Identify and reduce obstacles to sleep**, for example caffeine, long naps, or excessive use of screen time before bed (Matt. 17:20).
4. **Seek professional help.** If insomnia persists over time or if you experience increased anxiety or depression, I would urge you to seek professional help.

Remember to seek out professional help for chronic sleep disorders with your primary doctor or licensed counselor. Finally, remember that during sleepless nights we can rely on God’s Word, especially when our souls are weary (Ex. 33:14; John 14:27; Prov. 3:24; Ps. 91:1–13; Ps. 119:114). ■

Elijah's Prayer

Read 1 Kings 18:25–39

Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God.—1 Kings 18:37

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt underqualified? You feel pressured to act, maybe people are watching, but you have no idea what to do. If you are a person of prayer, you may cry out to Him, “God, why did you bring me to this place? What do you want me to do?” The prophet Elijah probably wondered about something similar when he faced King Ahab and the prophets of Baal on top of Mt. Carmel. He found himself in the midst of a dramatic showdown to determine who was the one true God: Yahweh or Baal.

After hours of shouting from the prophets of Baal, “Baal, answer us!” there was still no response (vv. 26–29). Then it was Elijah’s turn. As evening approached, the sun began creeping down behind the trees and the temperature dropped. The Israelites had been watching and waiting. They saw the altar Elijah repaired, the trench he dug, the wood he gathered,

the bull he cut into pieces. Everything was soaking wet (vv. 30–35). Elijah stepped forward and prayed. He may have been thinking, “God, if you are going to show up, now is a great time. I have done everything I can do, now do what only you can do.”

Elijah’s prayer begins by emphasizing Yahweh’s covenant name: “LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel” (v. 36). He then prays that Yahweh would turn their hearts back again so they would know that only Yahweh is God (vv. 36–37). Then something amazing happened. Almost immediately God responds with fire, burning up the sacrifice and the altar, even the water (v. 38). The verdict was in—Yahweh is the only true God!

► There may be times when you feel underqualified or all alone. At that moment, you must pray and watch and see what only God can do. It is only He who has the power to turn people’s hearts back again.

Pray with Us

Father, at times we feel helpless to make a difference. The truth is that we can’t reach people without you. We rejoice in our dependence on your power and ask for your intervention in the hearts of those we love.

David's Prayer for Deliverance

Read Psalm 3

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.—Romans 8:37

When sin occurs within a family, it can have a ripple effect that is far-reaching and long-lasting. A child may sin against a parent. A husband against a wife. Wrongs done may be remembered for years, and the residual anger can be destructive. It is in the midst of just such a situation that today's prayer occurs.

Absalom, the son of King David, harbored anger against his father. While David was a hero to many, that image came crashing down for Absalom. An unthinkable event occurred. David's daughter and Absalom's sister, Tamar, was raped by her half-brother, Amnon. When David discovered the heinous act, he was furious but did nothing (2 Sam. 13:22). This infuriated Absalom to the point that he killed his brother, Amnon, and then went after his father, starting a rebellion.

When David heard Absalom was coming, he fled (2 Sam. 15:12). Grief stricken and mourning, David

led his followers through the Mount of Olives. He had abandoned the throne God gave him, and David knew he needed to go to the Lord in prayer. In Psalm 3 David tells God that Absalom and his followers want him dead (vv. 1–2). He declares that Yahweh is his shield and defender (v. 3). He is confident that the Lord will answer (v. 4). During this tragic season of his life, sleep and waking were not things he took for granted. Despite his anxiety, the Lord gave him the rest he needed and the safety to wake alive the next day (vv. 5–6). One can almost feel David's emotions shift as he asks God to deliver him and to "strike down [his] enemies" (v. 7). David knew he was sinful, but he also knew deliverance would come only from the Lord.

► Are you facing an impossible situation? Surrender your sin to the Lord and pray that He will deliver you from the consequences of your sin. Only He can rescue you.

Pray with Us

We confess the bad we have done and the good we have not done. Grant us repentance, Lord, and by your mercy deliver us from the consequences of our sins.

David's Prayer for Forgiveness

Read Psalm 39

*Set a guard over my mouth, LORD;
keep watch over the door of my lips!—Psalm 141:3*

Silence can be a virtue. But sometimes, God gives us opportunities to speak truth, and we must be careful not to neglect the opening to make a meaningful difference. In our text today, David was silent when he should have spoken. His anguish increased when realizing he did not say anything good: “I remained utterly silent” (v. 2). In the first three verses of this prayer, David confesses his sin of silence (vv. 2–3). It is uncertain exactly what, when, and to whom he should have spoken, but he clearly missed an opportunity to speak God’s truth.

David realizes that opportunities to speak truth are precious. Life is fleeting and short (v. 4). In the New Testament, James writes that we “are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14). David was aware that one’s life in this world is short and we must make the most of every opportunity. The purpose of life is not to rush or gain wealth, but

rather to be committed to the Lord (Ps. 39:6).

David prays for repentance and admits his sin. He cast his hope to God for deliverance from his transgressions and affirmed the necessity of God’s correction (vv. 7–11). David’s prayer consists of both his confession of sin and his desire for the hope that can only be found in the Lord. He is so ashamed, with “weeping,” that he cannot fathom he could even be in the presence of God (vv. 12–13). However, if you read ahead to Psalm 40, you will see that God answered David’s prayer which included a promise of the one true Deliverer.

► Have there been times you were silent when you should have said something? Perhaps you noticed an injustice or habitual sin in someone’s life and did not speak up? Remember, this life is short, so let your words make a difference for God.

Pray with Us

Lord, we are natural critics. Give us discernment and humility to determine when we should address the issues we see. Give us wisdom to know what to say, and courage to say it with grace and truth.

David's Prayer for Favor

Read Psalm 5

In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly. —Psalm 5:3

Before I followed God's leading into full-time vocational ministry, I wanted to be an architect. I love design and structure. Did you know that our prayer life and our prayers need structure as well? Theologian D. A. Carson writes, "We do not drift into spiritual life; we do not drift into disciplined prayer. We will not grow in prayer unless we plan to pray."

The arrangement of this psalm is consistent with traditional Jewish prayers. The order establishes the precedence of moving from praise to petition. This approach to prayer was to first express repentance, praise, and adoration toward God and only afterwards express petition. This prayer from David was likely sung in connection with the prayers at the Temple's morning offerings (v. 3). David recognizes Yahweh as the true King and that, as an earthly king, he is simply occupying the Lord's throne (v. 2). David then transitions to God's holiness and fatherly compassion. In verses 4–6, David clearly contrasts

God's sacredness with the evilness of humanity. A right understanding of who God is and who we are correctly positions us to pray prayers that are pleasing to the Lord.

David emphasizes the only reason he can enter the Lord's house and worship is His extraordinary love (v. 7). The word David uses for *love* specifically points to the Lord's covenant love for His people. Now, he feels he can make his request to God. In verses 8 to 10, David asks the Lord to declare his enemies guilty because of their many sins. David's petition is not merely for their punishment, but rather for the Lord to be exalted. He concludes by confidently asking for protection for those who follow the Lord (vv. 11–12). David planned his prayer and the Lord answered.

► Consider how you structure your prayer. Do you typically start with an ask? Today, try beginning with praise and repentance. Getting in the right mindset and perspective allow our prayers to be more theologically aligned with God's will for our life.

Pray with Us

Gracious God, creation proclaims your creative majesty. You are the standard of holiness, truth, and justice. You made us to worship you, and this we do with joy!

Jonah's Prayer

Read Jonah 2:1–9

*When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you,
LORD, and my prayer rose to you.—Jonah 2:7*

Most of us are familiar with the story of Jonah, especially the part about the whale. Jonah was a prophet who refused the Lord's command to go to Nineveh and instead boarded a ship headed in the opposite direction. While Jonah could run, he could not hide from God. When the ship encountered a storm, Jonah was tossed into the sea (1:12). And, sure enough, when he was thrown overboard, "the raging sea grew calm" (1:15).

In the middle of the sea, Jonah came to realization that his life was going to end unless he submitted himself to the Lord. The Lord provided a way for Jonah not only to be transported to Nineveh but also an opportunity to cry out to the Lord. Jonah 2:1 tells us that "[f]rom inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God."

Jonah's prayer is a psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance. While clinging to life, Scripture was on his

mind. In his prayer, he recites the psalms at least three times (Ps. 18:6; 111:5; 120:1). God's Word was the foundation of his prayer, and it ought to be ours as well. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "The richness of God's Word ought to determine our prayer, not the poverty of our heart."

Jonah testifies to God's deliverance in verses 3 to 7 in what appears to be almost a play-by-play account of what happened. It climaxes in verse 7 when he finally surrendered his life to the Lord's will. He realized that he had been clinging to the worthless idol of selfishness and safety. In doing so, he was turning from the grace of God's love available to all (vv. 8–10). Thankfully, he realized: "Salvation comes from the LORD" (v. 9), and the Lord provided a way for him to share that with the world.

► Make sure your prayers are soaked in Scripture. When God's Word is on your heart and mind, it will also be in your prayers.

Pray with Us

Today we soak our prayer in God's Word, taking instruction from Romans 8:26: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

Habakkuk's Prayer

Read Habakkuk 3:1–19

*LORD, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD.—Habakkuk 3:2*

Habakkuk's prayer came shortly before the Babylonian invasion of Judah (605 BC). Facing His coming judgement, the prophet struggled with God's justice. However, Habakkuk wanted the righteous remnant of Judah to keep their heads high and to remain faithful to God even during the difficult days to come (2:4). He concludes his book with a prayer expressing his unwavering trust in the Lord, despite his insecurities and questions.

Habakkuk begins this prayer by acknowledging the Lord's fame and awesome deeds (3:2). He uses Yahweh's name twice in the first sentence to bookend his proclamation of God's reputation. Habakkuk stands in holy awe of Yahweh. In light of his current circumstance, it is no wonder that he requests Yahweh to repeat His miraculous deeds.

He begins by praising God for His deliverance in the past. Verses 3 to 7 recall the Israelites' flight from Egypt. He alludes to Mount Sinai (vv. 3–4), God's punishment through

pestilence and plague (v. 5), and God's descent to Sinai to give Moses the law (vv. 6–7). In the middle section (vv. 8–15), Habakkuk praises God for His power in bringing salvation. He declares Yahweh's strength and might over nature, armies, and kings. In the final section (vv. 16–19), Habakkuk expresses the challenging question of trusting in the Lord despite one's difficult circumstances.

In the midst of the coming destruction from the Babylonians, Habakkuk's heart was pounding and lips shaking (v. 16). Nonetheless, even though the coming invasion would lead to destruction and starvation, his faith and trust in Yahweh remained steadfast and he pledged to continue to exalt the Lord (vv. 17–18). The Lord was his source of hope and security, no matter the challenges he faced.

► Remembering God's goodness to us during difficult times in our life will help us pray through the difficulties we face. Thank God for His deliverance in your past as you pray for the hope of your future.

Pray with Us

You have delivered us through life's trials and difficulties, Father. We praise you for the compassion and power you have demonstrated in our lives. You are our rock as we face the future.

The Lord's Prayer

Read Luke 11:1–4

*When you pray, say,
“Father, hallowed be your name.”—Luke 11:2*

As we approach the last week of our study, we return to learn at the feet of Jesus who Himself showed us how to pray. The disciples longed to pray like Jesus and in Luke 11 we see the prayer template He gave them. Jesus never intended for these words to be said exactly. Rather, He was giving them as a pattern for our prayer.

Jesus began addressing His Father (v. 2). Over and over again, Jesus addressed God in this way, as *Father*. It is important to note that this particular term for Father is *Abba*, which means “Daddy.” Like the prodigal son who returned, or the daughter of Jairus when she was resurrected by Jesus, needy children address their father as “Daddy.” This may be difficult for some if the image of your dad is not pleasant. But Jesus wanted His disciples, and us, to know we have a perfect “Daddy” in heaven.

God is our Father, and He is holy. Jesus notes this characteristic of God first. And we, too, should take time

to praise and acknowledge God for who He is before we go into our list of requests. Job learned this principle the hard way. In Job 38:1–18, he quickly learned that Yahweh is not of this world. He is set apart and holy.

Jesus teaches that prayer begins with a proper understanding of who God is. He then taught us to say, “Give us . . . Forgive us . . . and Lead us” (vv. 3–4). We are to pray for the present, the past, and the future. Jesus knows Satan wants to destroy your soul! If there is temptation there is a tempter. But by turning first to our Father, we can be given our daily need, be forgiven of our sin, and be led away from the tempter. So when you pray, say, “Holy Father, give us, forgive us, and lead us.”

► As you pray today, use this pattern for prayer that Jesus gave His disciples. And, if you want to go further, consider reading Max Lucado’s book, *The Great House of God*.

Pray with Us

Abba Father, we praise your name! Forgive us for yesterday’s sins, grant us the needs we have today, fortify us to resist tomorrow’s temptations.

Don't Give Up

Read Luke 11:5–10

For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.—Luke 11:10

Angela Yuan was a fervent prayer warrior on behalf of her son. Christopher had made choices that led him far from God, but his mother, a strong believer, prayed day and night on his behalf. She asked: “Lord, do whatever it takes to bring this prodigal son out of that far country to you.” Every time God answered, even in a small way, Angela wrote the blessing on a spool of adding machine paper. Years later, she held up that list which was now six-feet long, covered on the front and back! Angela’s story inspires us to “always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1).

In our text today, Jesus follows His teaching on prayer (11:1–4) with a parable about a person who “seeks” — we’ll call this person the “Seeker.” In this story, the Seeker does his best to unconditionally love a friend who has come to stay with him. He has given him a place to stay, but he does not have any food to share with him (v. 6). The Seeker moves on to Plan B and

asks his neighbor for a few loaves of bread. Much to the Seeker’s disappointment, his neighbor refused (v. 7).

Jesus tells His listeners that despite this negative answer, the Seeker persisted and became a Knocker. And, his righteous perseverance paid off (v. 8). Jesus summarizes His teaching on prayer in verses 9 and 10. Our prayer ought to move from words to observance to action. The verbs in verses 9 and 10 communicate that we should *keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking*. Like a loving parent, our heavenly Father, is honored by the requests of His children (vv. 11–13). In return, God gives us our daily need, forgives us of our sins, and leads us down a path away from temptation and the Tempter.

► Your heavenly Father loves to provide for His children. Don’t hesitate to pray for areas that God can provide for you, and even more importantly, for those around you.

Pray with Us

We know you are a God of both power and compassion. Today we pray for our biggest worries—mental, physical, and spiritual. Grant us your healing, your wisdom, your grace and hope. Overcome our challenges for your glory!

Pray Persistently

Read Luke 18:1–8

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?—Luke 18:7

“Prayer is not eloquence, but earnestness,” said Hannah More, an English religious writer and philanthropist in the late 1700s. Prayer is “not the definition of helplessness, but the feeling of it; not figures of speech, but earnestness of soul.” For Hannah, prayer was not something believers do because they are supposed to, but because of who they are.

In our text today, Jesus shows how important it is that we persist in our prayers. Jesus’ intent is clear: “to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (v. 1). The advice Jesus gives to His disciples is to be taken as a lesson, not as a law. Nonetheless, the emphasis here is consistent, earnest prayer. The judge in Jesus’ parable had no reverence for God and compassion for people, let alone the widow. He continued to refuse her request (v. 4). Perhaps he was waiting for a bribe or some other selfish reward. But after time, he changed his mind and granted her request (v. 5). His explanation was not because he

feared God or suddenly had kindness toward her, but so she would stop wearing him out and possibly escalate to violence (v. 5).

Jesus explains His parable (vv. 6–8) by stating that if an unjust judge did this for the persistent widow, how much more would a perfect, loving, and honorable God do this for His people when they earnestly come to Him. Jesus is not implying that believers should badger God with prayers, but rather that we ought to pray consistently, persistently, and expectantly. When we pray this way, He will answer . . . maybe not as soon as we want, but His answers will be just what we need at just the right time.

► Persistent prayer can feel defeating when there seems to be no answer from God. Regardless of our perception, persistent prayer changes us into who He wants us to be. A prayer journal can be a good way to make a practice of consistent prayer. So keep praying!

Pray with Us

Father, with humble persistence we resubmit yesterday’s prayers to you. You have the power to heal bodies, touch minds, and change hearts. We appeal to your compassion for ourselves and our loved ones.

Two Ways to Pray

Read Luke 18:9–14

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.—Luke 18:14

One of the easiest traps we can fall into is the Comparison Trap. We look at the lives of others and begin comparing ourselves to them. Sometimes we are jealous, sometimes we look down on others, for who they are or the way they live their lives. The trap of comparison can even capture our prayer lives.

After explaining the parable of the widow who persistently prayed, the Lord taught His disciples about two opposite ways to pray: haughty or humble. The self-righteous Pharisee in Jesus' parable was filled with contempt for others and self-glorification. He thought that because of his "good" life he was justified before the Lord. His posture alone demonstrated his pride and arrogance (vv. 11–12). By contrast, near the corner stood the tax collector who humbly confessed he was a broken man, a sinner (v. 13). He begged the Lord to remove the punishment his sin rightly deserved. For Jesus to use a tax collector as the hero of the

parable would have been a shocking and unexpected twist for His disciples. But Jesus was emphasizing the way we approach prayer.

Jesus concludes in verse 14 by explaining that the humble tax collector, not the self-righteous Pharisee, walked away justified before God. D. L. Moody said, "He who kneels the most, stands the best." So it was for the tax collector. Only those who come to God with an authentic, repentant heart obtain a right standing with the Lord. Jesus wants believers to compare themselves to His perfect life. When we do, we realize that we are all sinners who need to humbly confess to the Savior. The good news is that when we do, Jesus is quick to show us the grace and mercy we do not deserve.

► Stop comparing yourself to others. Check your heart and motives before you pray. Ask the Lord to help you see your sin, and then honestly ask Him to remove it with the love of the gospel.

Pray with Us

Lord, Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us that we can't trust our hearts. Show us our sin and thwart our efforts to deceive ourselves. Replace our impure motives with a deep love for your ways.

Believer's Bold Prayers

Read Acts 4:1–31

Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.—Acts 4:29

Shortly after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples went into the Temple courts and healed a crippled man. The authorities opposed the crowds that soon gathered and tossed Peter and John into prison. The next day, they were questioned, "By what power, or what name did you do this?" (v. 7).

Remember that in the eyes of these men Peter was not the renowned apostle we know today. He was just Peter, the fisherman from Galilee. With a spirit-empowered boldness, Peter stood and proclaimed that salvation is found only through the resurrection of Jesus (vv. 8–12). Not knowing how to handle the situation and the undeniable fact that the cripple had been healed, they ordered Peter and John not to speak about Jesus any longer. However, Peter and John again replied with great courage that they could not stop speaking about Jesus and what they had "seen and heard" (v. 20).

After being let go, Peter and John returned to the other disciples and prayed for more boldness. Notice

that their prayer was not centered on safety from the threats, but rather for the Lord "to enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness" (v. 29). The Lord answered their prayer as they were all immediately "filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (v. 31).

The early believers went out with great boldness and proclaimed the simple message of Jesus all around the known world. John ended up being exiled to an island. Peter was murdered in Rome. Many other believers were killed at the hands of the Romans, oftentimes in cruel and humiliating ways. But even in the face of severe opposition, the church began to grow and build gatherings that proclaimed a bold message. At the core of their message was not a teaching but an event—the resurrection of Jesus—and they couldn't stop talking about it.

► A bold message requires bold messengers. May we pray bold prayers like the early church, no matter what circumstances we face.

Pray with Us

Dear God, we know that the world hates you and hates us because of you. Strengthen our trembling hearts and grant us boldness to proclaim the gospel, even in the face of hatred.

Prayer and Ministry

Read Acts 6:1–7

[We] will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.—Acts 6:4

Will Graham said that his grandfather, the Rev. Billy Graham, once gave him life-changing advice: “Pray. Pray. Pray,” said Graham, then added, “Study. Study. Study.” Will said, “Whatever walk of life you are in, I hope that you can hear my grandfather’s instruction and take it to heart as well. We can get so busy that our efforts begin to crowd out our relationship with God.” No matter how we choose to serve God, it is best to start first with prayer.

The growth of the church created unique issues for the first-century church leadership as we can see in Acts 6. The Hellenistic Jews were Messianic Jews who had adopted the Greek language and culture. Due to the language barrier, their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (v. 1). The twelve apostles were stuck having to choose between administrative needs and the ministry of the Word of God which most likely meant sharing the good news of Jesus’ resurrection (v. 2). They

decided to delegate the important task of daily food distribution to those who were more gifted. The apostles felt they would better serve the church body by focusing on ministry of the Word.

When first faced with what to do, the apostles mention their responsibility was to “the ministry of word” (v. 2). In verse four, they give a full job description of their responsibilities: “*prayer and the ministry of the word.*” The option of whether or not to pray was never in doubt. Prayer was a vital ingredient for the early church just as it is for the body of Christ today. Whenever we consider what needs to be delegated or cut out of our busy lives, prayer should never be on the table. E. M. Bounds writes, “None but praying leaders can have praying followers.”

► Consider what daily things crowd out your prayer time. What can you rearrange or delegate in your life, to make your prayer time a priority?

Pray with Us

Thank you, God, that every day you are conforming us to the image of your Son (Rom. 8:29). Throughout the gospels, Jesus devoted Himself to constant prayer. Teach us to pray with Christ’s fervent heart.

A Praying Family

Read Acts 10:1–48

God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.—Acts 10:31

Puritan preacher Thomas Brookes once said, “A family without prayer is like a house without a roof, open and exposed to all the storms of heaven.” Praying as a family can be challenging. But when a family learns to pray together, amazing things can happen. Such was the case for Cornelius and his family as they feared the Jewish God and prayed to Him regularly.

In Acts 10, we meet Cornelius, a Roman centurion. He and his family prayed regularly to God (v. 2). They would have been part of a small minority of Gentiles who worshiped Yahweh. During one of his prayer times, the Lord gave Cornelius a vision to meet Simon Peter (vv. 3–6). The next day, Peter was praying when he too had a vision from the Lord (v. 9). Peter’s vision was not about food laws, but rather God’s attitude toward the Gentiles. The Lord was signaling a new era for Jesus’ followers that would include Jews and non-Jews into one family. Without Peter’s vision,

it is unlikely the apostle would have ventured to Cornelius’s home and met this God-fearing family.

Peter was able to comprehend the Lord’s message because he was in a spirit of prayer. He quickly determined to obey God. Similarly, in prayer, Cornelius and his family sought after the Triune God even though they had very little knowledge of everything that happened in Jerusalem. Because Peter, Cornelius, and his family were all in prayer, they were able to build bridges that broke through division. The saving grace of Jesus was now offered to all. The family table had been extended for all to come and have a place.

► Do you pray with your family? Spend time together this week asking God to work in your family and to use you for His purpose. Even if you are praying together for the first time, when a family prays together, amazing things can happen.

Pray with Us

Lord, we come before you as a family and ask you to use us to accomplish your purposes. Unite us and give us opportunities to demonstrate your sacrificial love to those in need.

Transformed by God

Read Ephesians 1:15–23

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.—Ephesians 1:18

As faculty at a Bible college, we want our students to go beyond just studying the Bible. We want them not just to know *about* God but also to grow in their relationship *with* Him. We want them not just to believe *in* God but to actively follow and live *for* Him. The same goes for you and me too. Don't just be informed about Him, be transformed by Him.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has at least two prayers in it. In this first chapter of his letter, Paul acknowledges the Ephesians' faith in Christ Jesus, their love for one another, and thanks the Lord for what He has been doing in their lives (vv. 15–16). This is no small accomplishment, especially when so many others struggle with loving the Lord and loving others. So, Paul's prayer for them is that through the power of the Spirit, they know God better (v. 17).

In verses 18 and 19, Paul reminds us that total transformation comes when we take part in the riches of

the glorious inheritance of the saints in heaven. This world as we know it is not our final resting place. Through Christ, we have been given great hope and great power. Paul explains that the same incredible power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and seated Him on His heavenly throne lives on in believers (vv. 19–23). The resurrection power of Jesus was not just a one-time display of God's greatness and glory, it is showcased every time a believer allows the Spirit to transform an area of his or her life.

That is awe-inspiring power, available to you and to me! Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is magnificent because it applies to us as well. Don't just pray to pray. Instead, pray to know God and allow His power to transform your life!

► What areas of your life can you ask God to transform? How can you get to know Him better and walk more closely with Him?

Pray with Us

We long to know you intimately and increasingly, Lord God. Our lives are open to you. Invade every aspect of our identities; flood our minds and devote our hearts to you.

Christ in You

Read Ephesians 3:14–21

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.—Ephesians 3:17

Robert Munger, a Presbyterian minister, once wrote a small booklet titled “My Heart, Christ’s Home.” In story form, he depicts Jesus being welcomed into our heart as a guest. As Jesus explores each room, and even the hidden hall closet, Munger makes the case that when believers invite Jesus into their lives, He ought to occupy every aspect of it. Munger asks, “If your heart were a home, would Jesus Christ be an honored guest or would he be a permanent resident?”

In chapter 3 of Ephesians, Paul prays that Christ takes up a permanent residence in their hearts and in their church. How are we supposed to pray for the church? We know we should, but what should our prayers be like? Here Paul shows us how. He asks that the Ephesians be strengthened with power through the Lord’s glorious riches. He acknowledges that if a church is to be strong in the midst of adversity and attacks by the enemy, it can only happen by God’s strength and power (v. 16).

He then moves to pray for the church which is the inner being, or inner self. Some portions of Scripture emphasize prayer for our physical self. Here, Paul prays for something deeper. He prays that Christ may dwell in their faithful hearts (v. 17). The word “dwell” connotes the idea of abiding forever.

Paul prays that these believers will be rooted and established in love (v. 17). Using both an agricultural and an architectural term he drives home the point: the deeper the roots the higher the tree. The stronger the foundation the more fortified the structure. He concludes by praying that the depths of the richness of God’s grace, love, and greatness be lifted high in the church and throughout all generations (vv. 18–21).

► The text of Robert Munger’s booklet is available online. Read it and spend time in prayer, asking Christ to dwell in your life and in the life of the church. Pray that He will not be just an honored guest but a permanent resident.

Pray with Us

Father, we want you to permeate every area of our lives, for nothing is set apart from you. Consecrate our work, our home, our leisure, and our relationship to you. Teach us to worship you in all we do.

A Person of Prayer

Read James 5:13–18

*The prayer of a righteous person
is powerful and effective.—James 5:16*

Dutch Christian and Holocaust survivor Corrie Ten Boom was known as a woman of prayer. She once said, “What wings are to a bird and sails to a ship, so is prayer to the soul.” As we end our study on powerful prayers from the Bible, one of the unifying themes we have seen is that each praying person exhibited a deep love for the Lord. As believers, we know there is great power in prayer, and a life steeped in prayer can be greatly used by God.

The half-brother of Jesus, Pastor James, knew this too. James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. In his letter to his flock scattered among the nations he emphasized the importance of prayer in the Christian’s life. In our text today he begins by saying that if anyone is in trouble, happy, or sick, prayer and praise is always the answer (vv. 13–15). He also admonished them to confess their sins to one another and pray for healing. He summarizes his thoughts by saying, “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (v. 16).

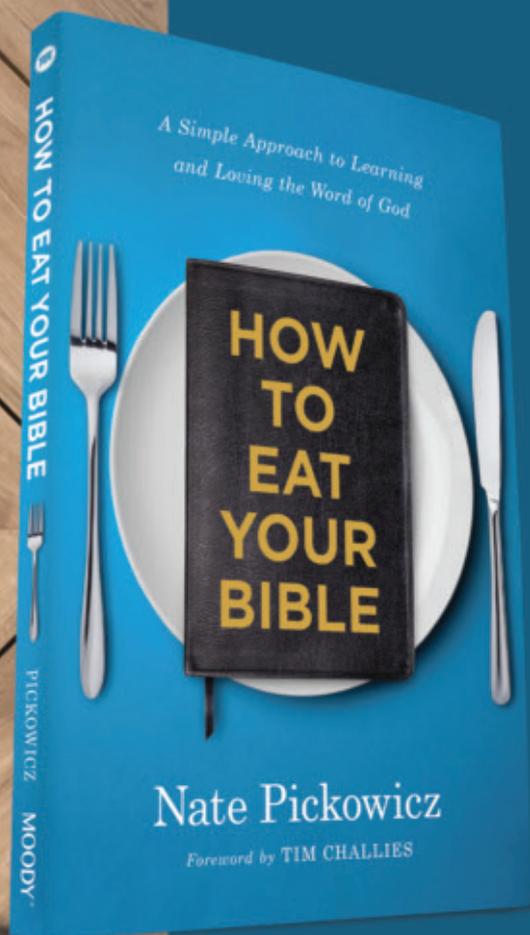
In this letter, James reminds us that a life steeped in prayer spills over into action. While we are found righteous only because of Jesus, our personal walk ought to reflect Christ’s teachings. When we center our lives on Jesus and live in a way that is worthy of our calling, our prayers become even more powerful and effective. Is it any wonder that some say Mary Queen of Scots dreaded the prayers of Reformer and Pastor John Knox more than the armies of King Philip?

James concludes by pointing to Elijah as a biblical example of a man who lived a godly life and prayed earnestly and effectively (vv. 17–18). The prayers and the lives of faithful men and women are powerful and can accomplish much!

► May the lessons we’ve learned this month challenge us to become people of prayer. Remember that the life you live is just as important as the prayers you pray.

Pray with Us

When we encounter problems, some of us complain, some rage, and some deny. Lord, help us cultivate an attitude of prayer in all circumstances and praise you as the giver of peace, wisdom, and righteousness.



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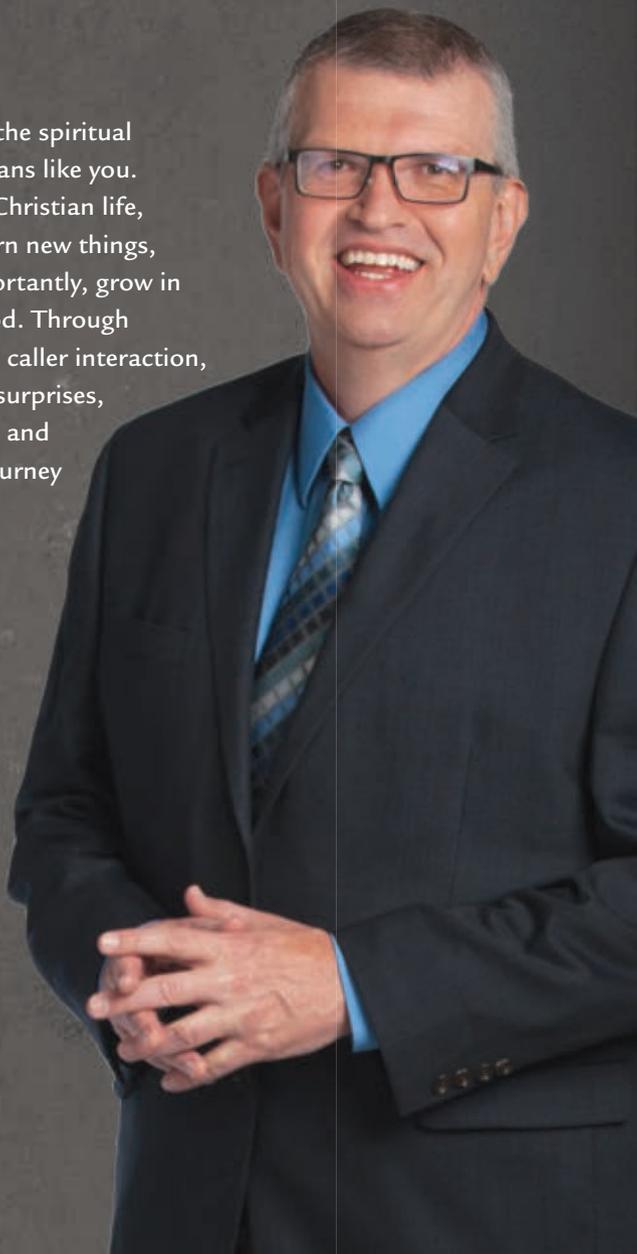
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