Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:16
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Welcome to *Today in the Word*

We are so glad you share our desire to read and learn from God’s Word.

Allow us to tell you a bit of history that explains the purpose of this *free* monthly publication. In the late 1800s, an evangelist named Dwight L. Moody started a Bible school in Chicago because he believed ordinary individuals should know God’s Word and be prepared to share it with others. We continue that tradition today at Moody Global Ministries through higher education, Moody Radio, Moody Publishers, and through the publication you are holding in your hand, *Today in the Word*. We want to equip you with the knowledge of God’s Word so that you can impact the world for Christ! We hope that *Today in the Word* becomes an encouraging part of your day.

Some months focus on a topic, exploring Bible passages to help you understand God’s perspective on certain issues. Other months go through an entire book of the Bible. Readers who stay with *Today in the Word* find that they read through quite a bit of the Bible in a year!

Each devotional follows a set format. At the very top corner is your **daily Scripture reading**. This is the passage you should read in the Bible to correspond with the day’s reading. It is helpful to read this before you read the devotional. After you have read the Scripture passage, you should read the **daily devotional**. This section helps explain the day’s Bible reading. It is meant to help you understand key points of that day’s Scripture.

At the bottom left of each page is **Apply the Word**, which helps you take the daily reading and connect it to your life. It’s often a prayer topic, question for discussion, an activity to try, or recommended resources to learn more. At the bottom right of each page is a **Pray with Us** section. We ask you, our friends near and far, to join us in praying for God’s work through Moody’s ministry. We pray for our staff members throughout the year and give you a bit of insight into what they do. We are blessed by the many prayer partners who take a moment to lift up this work before the Lord.

On behalf of all of us at Moody, we welcome you to the *Today in the Word* family. We hope you decide to continue with us and grow in the knowledge and riches of God’s Word!
The Way Prayer Works

Prayer is part of the daily routine of most Christians. Many of us begin and end the day with prayer. We pray over our meals. In the life of the church, every public event, no matter how common, serves as an occasion for prayer. Despite this frequent practice of prayer, many wonder how prayer works.

Frequently, our goal in prayer is to obtain answers. We pray hoping that God will grant our requests. Yet the primary aim of prayer is not to persuade God to do our will. We cannot use prayer to put pressure on God or twist His arm. The only prayer that God will answer is one that already conforms to His will (1 John 5:14–15). The real function of prayer is to express our need.

When we pray, we do not provide God with information that He does not already have. Jesus has assured us that our Father in heaven knows what we need before we ask Him (Matt. 6:8). He knows what we will say before we say it (Ps. 139:4; cf. Isa. 65:24). We cannot impress Him with our language or shock Him with our bluntness. If so, then why do we even need to pray? We need to pray because God works through prayer. Answers come only when God’s people pray. James implied as much when he warned: “You do not have because you do not ask God” (James 4:2).

But C. S. Lewis has observed that prayer does not “work” in the mechanical sense of the word. “The very question ‘Does prayer work?’ puts us in the wrong frame of mind from the outset,” Lewis warns, noting that request is only one dimension of prayer. “Prayer in the sense of petition, asking for things, is a small part of it; confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and enjoyment of God its bread and wine.”

So why bother to pray, since we cannot make prayer “work” for us? The power of prayer does not lie in the certainty that we will get the things we request. Often we don’t. We pray because we need to pray. We pray, albeit poorly, because we can’t help but pray. Most of all, we pray because God has invited us to pray, and through prayer He enters into fellowship with us. Prayer is our declaration of dependence upon God. It is a moment-by-moment confession that in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

FOR FURTHER STUDY
To learn more about the mystery of prayer, read the essay “The Efficacy of Prayer” in The World’s Last Night and Other Essays by C. S. Lewis (Harper).
Prayer

Where do we turn for help? To whom do we run when times get hard? Whom do we praise most often? Whom do we thank most vigorously? Where do we pour out our hearts? Who can take on all our problems and the worries of an entire world?

God should be our answer to all these questions. But realistically, it’s hard to pray every time we should. We may not react to every situation with prayer, but thought this month’s study we’ll try to improve on that. Today in the Word focuses on prayer as it is outlined in the Bible, and we’ll see how prayer influenced the followers of Christ.

As we follow Him together, we pray that Today in the Word helps you on the journey. You are truly a help for us in ministry.
Sometimes cartoons contain a wealth of theology. Consider a Family Circus cartoon in which a father overhears his son’s evening prayers: “Listen to this, God, here’s an offer you can’t refuse.” Although we may chuckle at its candor, this cartoon pinpoints a common misconception about prayer—namely, prayer is about getting God to do something for us.

At its core, however, prayer is not about getting something but about entering into the presence of Someone. Bob Benson and Michael W. Benson, a father-son team who coauthored Disciplines for the Inner Life, wrote, “Prayer is the movement of God to humanity and humanity to God, the act of meeting.” This view of prayer changes our perspective and opens the door to deep communion with our heavenly Father, who is eager for such a relationship.

Consider today’s verse from Isaiah: “...before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.” We focus this month on prayer. We will begin by examining common obstacles to prayer, such as distractions and misconceptions of God. We then focus on attitudes of our heart that facilitate prayer, such as brokenness and belief. Building on this foundation, we will look at types of prayers, such as praise, confession, and intercession. Finally, we will consider the internal and external fruits that prayer yields.

APPLY THE WORD

The format for this month will be a bit different. Although we will look at many Bible passages and Christian thinkers’ views on prayer, the feel will be more “hands-on” as we explore various approaches to prayer.

Each day will open with a short prayer drawn from the church’s rich treasury of written prayers. Following a discussion on a particular aspect of prayer will be an extended application designed to enrich your prayer life, often including another written prayer example.

Although some approaches may be unfamiliar to you, it is our hope that these suggestions will deepen your relationship with God. If, however, a particular approach to prayer seems unnatural, pray as God leads you. It is our sincere hope that this “workshop” will bless and encourage you, while fortifying a practice of continual prayer to the Father.

As a prelude to our study, take a few minutes to consider (in writing if possible) the following questions: How do you define prayer? In light of John 15:5, how important do you think prayer is? What is your biggest obstacle to praying? How important is it to pray the “right” words? List three things that you would like to change in your prayer life.

Prayer is a deep privilege given to God’s children! May we be greatly encouraged through this spiritual journey together!
Be still, and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

God, Our Father, we know our own weakness. Our minds are darkened . . . our wills are weak, and by ourselves we cannot resist temptations, or bring to its completion that which we resolve to do. . . . So this day we ask you, to enlighten us; to strengthen us; to guide us, that we may know you, and love you, and follow you all the days of our life.—William Barclay, Prayers for the Christian Year

A recent survey among Christians identified the following obstacles to prayer: lack of time, too many distractions, self-sufficiency, and exhaustion. Perhaps you can relate to this list or could add your own items. Based on today’s passage from Luke, preoccupation with daily chores would have been on Martha’s list (vv. 40–42).

Our culture doesn’t help much either; a demand for instant and quantifiable results can make prayer feel like a powerless waste of time. Moreover, seemingly endless distractions—from TV to shopping malls to the internet—daily bombard us.

Anxiety over financial difficulties or medical problems can choke out prayer. At times, God’s apparent silence can make us too frustrated or angry to pray. Selfishness and sin make us resist the Lord or pray with wrong motives (James 4:3). Sometimes we just fall into a rut in our prayer life and feel bored.

APPLY THE WORD

So how do we overcome such obstacles? First, we can set aside any notion of the “right” way to pray and begin by praying any way we can! Certainly disciplined prayer is every believer’s aim, but this goal shouldn’t keep us from actually praying!

Take some time today to identify at least three obstacles you face in prayer, including the ones you may have identified yesterday. If time is the biggest problem, start by praying for just five minutes each day. Or if distraction is the problem, each time your mind wanders, instead of feeling guilty, thank the Lord for revealing this to you and ask Him for increased focus. Perhaps the thing distracting you is actually a matter for prayer. If boredom is a problem, consider new approaches to prayer, such as the ones offered in this month’s study, or ask the Lord to expand your vision of Him.

This prayer may express your feelings:

Dear Jesus, how desperately I need to learn to pray. And yet when I am honest, I know that I often do not even want to pray. I am distracted! I am stubborn! I am self-centered! In your mercy, Jesus, bring my “want-er” more in line with my “need-er” so that I can come to want what I need. In your name and for your sake, I pray. Amen.

—Richard Foster, Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home
O Lord of Hosts, you are Lord alone. You have made the heavens and the earth and all living things that dwell there. Your hand is the soul of every living thing. I would come before you with worship and honor this day. In the name of Christ I pray. Amen.

—Bob Benson Sr. and Michael Benson, Disciplines for the Inner Life

In his book The God Who Hears, Bingham Hunter writes, “At its root, prayer grows from the certainty of God’s omnipotence and sovereignty.” If we didn’t believe that the Lord was in charge, we probably wouldn’t waste our time praying.

Yet many Christians struggle with God’s sovereignty and the question, “Why don’t I get what I pray for?” Sometimes unanswered prayer is the result of wrong motives, but some unanswered prayer simply defies our comprehension. For this reason, it’s important to consider God’s sovereignty along with His goodness.

Surely the greatest indication of God’s sovereignty and love is Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Although we may never fully understand our Father’s reasons for not answering certain prayers, our relationship with Him grows when we consider His all-powerful control in light of His all-loving nature. We can then rest in His will without fear or anxious attempts to “assist” Him with what we’re sure He is going to do!

God’s sovereignty and the mystery of unanswered prayer leads some Christians to ask, “Why bother to pray at all?” God’s power could make prayer seem pointless, if the purpose of prayer were simply to get things done. Although popular sayings such as “prayer changes things” are certainly well-intentioned, it might be better to say “God changes things” and “prayer changes us.” This shifts the focus of prayer from results to relationship. Understanding God’s sovereignty in this light enables us to pray with confidence, because we know that God is both sovereign and committed to our good.

“Prayer problems are usually not intellectual, but volitional,” writes Bingham Hunter. Not surprisingly then, one of the ways prayer changes us is to align our will increasingly with the Father’s will, which eventually brings us to a deeper level of submission to Him.

Take time today to ponder and reflect on God’s sovereignty and prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any misunderstandings you may have. Then pray along with the following prayer:

Lord, I am yours; I do yield myself up entirely to you, and I believe that you do take me. I leave myself with you. Work in me all the good pleasure of your will, and I will only lie still in your hands and trust you. Amen.

—Hannah Whithall Smith, The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life

Daniel 4:35

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth.
God unto whom all hearts are open and unto whom every will speaks, and from whom no secret thing is hidden, I pray You to cleanse the intent of my heart with the ineffable gift of Your grace, that I may perfectly love You, and worthily praise You. Amen.

—The Cloud of Unknowing, Author unknown

It’s hard to comprehend the fact that God knows everything—every thought or deed, past, present, or future, is fully known by Him. A faulty understanding of God’s knowledge—His omniscience—can undermine prayer.

God’s omniscience seems to beg the question, “What can we tell God if He knows everything already?” In his book The God Who Hears, Bingham Hunter points out that although Western logic says that there is nothing we can tell God, Jesus’ life clearly suggests another answer. Because the Lord already knows all about our lives, we are free to tell Him anything and everything. Think about that! The freedom to share openly every thought and feeling, from seemingly insignificant details to ungodly anger to our deepest desires—this is the freedom we have before our Lord.

Closely related to God’s omniscience is His love—He knows it all and still loves us! Once again we see that prayer isn’t about a method but a relationship—it isn’t about a place but a Presence.

**APPLY THE WORD**

Within every person is the desire to know and to be known. God’s omniscience, beautifully described in Psalm 139, powerfully attests that we are indeed known. God’s omniscience also gives us the freedom to know ourselves better. Without the assurance that God knows and loves us, self-examination can spiral into morbid introspection. In God’s loving presence, however, such examination can lead to liberation.

In his book Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home, Richard Foster writes, “It is actually possible today for people to go to church services . . . for years without having a single experience of spiritual examen [examination]. What a tragedy!” He then describes the two aspects of the “prayer of the examen”: “The first is an examen of consciousness through which we discover how God has been present to us throughout the day and how we have responded to his loving presence. The second is an examen of conscience in which we uncover those areas that need cleansing, purifying, and healing.”

Take time today to review the ways that God has revealed Himself to you throughout the day, perhaps through His Word, through a sunrise or sunset, or through another person. What is your response to these gifts? Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas in need of change and liberation. A journal is a helpful tool for these spiritual exercises.
Father, cleanse me through Your Word. Let it search out and bring to light all that is of self and the flesh in my faith. Let it cut away every root of self-confidence, that the Vine may find me wholly free to receive His life and spirit. . . . Only You are my hope. Amen.

—Andrew Murray, The True Vine

As we consider God in whom there is no darkness, we begin to understand why Isaiah reacted to God's holiness with an overwhelming sense of his own sinfulness (Isa. 6:5). God's moral perfection may make us wonder how He could ever hear our prayers, or even why He would want to.

We must remember that the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ enables us to approach the throne of grace with confidence (Heb. 4:16). Yet at the same time, we need to acknowledge that sin in our lives impedes prayer. Psalm 66:18 states, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." First Peter 3:7 expands on this, teaching that improper attitudes in human relationships also hinder prayer. Additionally, because God is holy, when we fail to seek His holiness, we are unable to hear Him clearly. As Bingham Hunter writes, "Persons not praying on his wavelength—or talking with static on the line—have trouble communicating: they cannot understand what he is saying."

APPLY THE WORD

Understanding God's holiness should deepen our appreciation of the Holy Spirit whom the Father has sent in the name of His Son Jesus (John 14:26). The Spirit of Truth dwelling within us leads us into God's truth and helps us to discern error and sin within and around us. The indwelling Spirit enables us to yearn for God's holiness and to walk in His ways.

It's not surprising that the Holy Spirit is integrally woven into New Testament passages on prayer. Spend some time today reflecting on the Holy Spirit's role in prayer as revealed in John 14:15–27; 16:5–16; and Romans 8:1–39. What does Jesus promise the Spirit will do? How does the Spirit help us pray? Then ask the Holy Spirit to open your spirit to His leading in holiness and to His prompting in prayer in new and deeper ways.

The following prayer may be a helpful guide as you pray for holiness.

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

—Bob Benson Sr. and Michael W. Benson, Disciplines for the Inner Life
Several years ago a popular book addressed a difficult topic: why bad things happen to good people. This haunting question can thwart prayer because we can’t understand why God lets us suffer. This profound question can only be briefly touched on in today’s lesson.

We can start by acknowledging that we live in a fallen world filled with evil and sin. Because we live in the world, we are impacted by evil, even when there’s no direct connection between this evil and sin in our own lives. Yet evil in the world is a constant reminder of the overwhelming need for the cross.

And the cross is where we acknowledge the redemptive hand of God, which brings forth His good purposes from circumstances intended for evil. God doesn’t make evil good, but He can redeem evil for His good.

Understanding God’s redemptive character enables us to focus on His goodness and mercy in the midst of suffering. We may not understand how God can work good, but we can rest in the confidence that God’s nature is good, merciful, and redemptive.

Finally, we need to feel freedom to come before the Lord honestly in our pain. Sometimes tears are the only prayer we can offer up, and our Lord understands those times of hurt and pain. He will hear our prayer of tears. Look at the following prayer or the reading from Psalm 130 as the basis of your own prayer before God.

I cry tears to You Lord, tears because I cannot speak. Words are lost among my fears, pain, sorrows, losses, hurts, but tears You understand—my wordless prayer You hear. Lord wipe away my tears, all tears, not in a distant day but now, here.

—Joseph Bayly, Psalms of My Life, from The God Who Hears
“Apart from Me—you are nothing.” Lord, I gladly accept the arrangement: I am nothing—You are all. My nothingness is my highest blessing, because You are the Vine, which gives and works all, so be it, Lord!

—Andrew Murray, The True Vine

Psalm 51:17

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Humility and brokenness aren’t very popular in our culture. Although some action heroes show sensitivity, the message of our society is that success demands toughness. But “having your act together” runs contrary to Scripture. Over and over, we see people driven to the Lord in their helpless need.

For the past few days, we’ve considered aspects of God’s nature that need to be understood to foster prayer. For the next few days, we’ll consider attitudes of our hearts that open us to prayer. Helplessness is one such attitude.

Consider the following insights from Ole Hallesby in his excellent book Prayer: “Listen, my friend! Your helplessness is your best prayer. It calls from your heart to the heart of God with greater effect than all your uttered pleas. He hears it from the very moment that you are seized with helplessness, and He becomes actively engaged at once in hearing and answering the prayer of your helplessness.”

Our Lord has a special name for the poor and broken: “blessed” (Matt. 5:3–5).

APPLY THE WORD

Self-sufficiency can be a serious barrier to prayer. Many people take the adage “the Lord helps those who help themselves” to mean that they can never come to the Lord until they have exhausted their own resources. But passivity and helplessness are not the same.

Isaiah’s attitude was brokenness in the blinding light of God’s holiness (v. 5). Yet Isaiah’s eager response, “Here am I!” (v. 8) reveals how he was actively ready to respond to God. Or consider the woman in today’s reading from Mark. Despite her best efforts to find help, her terrible condition worsened and she desperately sought Jesus (vv. 26–27). Both this woman and Isaiah show the close link between humility, coming helplessly before the Lord, and obedience.

Do you ponder your true helplessness and vulnerability apart from Christ? Reflect back on Andrew Murray’s prayer. Then ask the Lord to translate your sense of brokenness into an eager willingness to follow Him more fully. Christina Rosetti’s prayer, from Little Book of Prayers, may spark further prayers for humble obedience.

Speak, Lord, for your servant hears. Grant me ears to hear, eyes to see, a will to obey, a heart to love; then declare what you will, reveal what you will, command what you will, demand what you will. Amen.
Many misconceptions surround the relationship between prayer and faith. Sometimes well-intentioned people exhort us—perhaps even quoting Matthew 21:22—that with enough faith, our prayers will be answered. So when confronted by unanswered prayer, we often feel guilty or discouraged by our apparent lack of faith.

To begin with, it’s important to be clear about the object of our faith, which Scripture makes plain can only be Jesus. Indeed, the context in Matthew 21 stresses Jesus’ authority in prayer. Thus it is not our ability to believe or faith in faith itself that counts. Actually, any time we pray expresses faith in God.

Some prayers we can be sure God will answer, such as forgiveness for sin (1 John 1:9). But there are some prayers, clearly consistent with His loving nature, such as the salvation of loved ones, that may not be answered according to our understanding or timing. In these situations, we must lean on the object of our faith—our Lord. Faith in a Person enables us to leave answers to our prayers firmly in the loving hands of the One to whom we pray.

Think about prayer and belief in your own life. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any ways in which you may have shifted the focus of your faith away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Also ask for discernment when dealing with the many false notions about faith that are currently popular in our culture—expressions such as “if you believe it, you can achieve it” or “just have faith!”

Next, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal specific areas or circumstances in your life where a lack of belief seems to hinder you. Although God may choose not to answer certain prayers, we still know that nothing is impossible with our sovereign God! (Luke 1:37).
In addition to humility and faith—our focus for the past two days—Scripture also teaches the need for persistence in prayer. We often hear of missionaries praying for certain people groups for decades or of individuals praying for another’s salvation for years.

In today’s passages from Luke, Jesus drew on real-life situations and used contrast to illustrate this kind of persistent prayer. If even a reluctant neighbor and an unfair judge can be persuaded to respond, how much more will the Father in Heaven, who is neither reluctant nor unfair, be willing to give?

The command to ask in Luke 11:9–10 is clearly linked to how we pray—persistently, without giving up—and to what we pray for—things that the Father is willing to give, such as the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13) and justice (18:7).

Even prayers for things that the Father seems willing to give, such as others’ salvation, aren’t always answered according to our prayers. God’s love allows all people to make their own choices—but in the meantime, we need to keep praying for their salvation!

**APPLY THE WORD**

Persistence in prayer runs counter to the instantaneous, noncommittal world in which we live. Why would we ever need to ask God for something more than once?

If we view prayer as simply a means to get something, then, of course, repeatedly petitioning the Lord makes no sense. It’s only when we focus on prayer as a relationship with our heavenly Father that we understand that continually bringing our requests to Him deepens our dependence and devotion to Him.

Persistence in prayer, especially over years, is hard. Here are some suggestions to encourage you. First, meditate on today’s passages from Luke and on Galatians 6:9: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Second, seek out a prayer partner. Just as persistent prayer deepens our relationship with the Father, so too continued prayer strengthens our relationships with other believers. Finally, read about examples of persistent prayer such as Jim Elliot or George Müller—we can learn much through the spiritual maturity and prayers of other believers.

The great fault of the children of God is, they do not continue in prayer; they do not go on praying; they do not persevere. If they desire anything for God’s glory, they should pray until they get it.

—George Müller
Sometimes children—and adults—just wish they could see God. The disciples felt the same way; that’s why Jesus said that anyone who had seen Him had seen the Father (John 14:9). Through the gospel accounts, we not only “see” the Father as we see Jesus, but we also see how Jesus related to the Father. And because we are now children of God, Jesus’ relationship with His Father teaches us a great deal about prayer.

For one thing, prayer characterized Jesus’ life. He prayed before meals, before healings, and before miracles, such as the raising of Lazarus. He prayed for His disciples and He prayed for those who would come to believe through them. He wrestled in prayer before the Father as He faced the cross. In short, Jesus’ life was—and is—a continual prayer, or conversation, with the Father.

And the “Spirit of sonship” by which we cry out, “Abba, Father,” enables us also to live a life of prayer with the Father. This same Spirit intercedes for us as we pray (Rom. 8:16, 27).

**APPLY THE WORD**

In her book *Prayer: Conversing with God*, Rosalind Rinker writes, “Prayer is the expression of the human heart in conversation with God. The more natural the prayer, the more real he becomes. It has all been simplified for me to this extent: Prayer is a dialogue between two persons who love each other.”

In our study, we’ve emphasized this same point: prayer is about relationship between God and His children. Yet conversation with God may not feel as comfortable as with other people. We may not feel the same freedom to express our doubts or anger to God or may feel we have to say the right thing. The following words by D. L. Moody are particularly encouraging here: “Sometimes when your child talks, your friends cannot understand what he says; but the mother understands very well. So if our prayer comes from the heart, God understands our language.”

Consider your closest human relationship and its specific blessings—the freedom to share your dreams, to express your concerns, or to simply be quiet together. Now meditate on what it means to be God’s child. Our relationship with God far exceeds any human relationship, so as we grow in Christ, we can experience more freedom, more joy, and more comfort with Him than anyone else.
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

—Matthew 6:9–13

It’s hardly surprising that the most remarkable prayer in history was uttered by Jesus! Countless believers have contemplated this prayer, written about it, and even put it to music.

To begin, “Our Father,” shows that this prayer is rooted in community and in relationship. The unbelievable privilege of calling God “Father” still requires that His glory and His holy name be completely honored (v. 9). Verse 10 asks that the kingdom of God, having entered human history in Jesus’ incarnation, continue its saving work until it is ultimately consummated on earth—when all creation will conform to God’s perfect will.

Having focused on eternal glories, Jesus then prayed for daily necessities, summing up all that is needed for temporal existence in the prayer for daily bread (v. 11). And if “bread” reveals our utter physical dependence on our Father, then the prayer for forgiveness addresses our soul’s deepest need (v. 12).

Finally, the last petition prays for protection from our ultimate enemy, the evil one (v. 13).

**APPLY THE WORD**

Did you notice that Jesus said that this prayer was “how” we were to pray, not simply “what” we were to pray (Matt. 6:9)? Of course, it is a great blessing to recite this prayer and if you haven’t already memorized it, now is a great time to do so. Yet we miss a lot if we stop there.

There are many ways to use this prayer as an example. Begin by meditating on what each line means and what the “core” of each petition is. For example, “hallowed be your name” means that God’s name should be treated as holy. Ask God to show you ways you might have dishonored His name, such as using it in vain.

Similarly, reflect on what it means to trust God for daily bread—the popularity of large freezers can make this more difficult! So you might pray that the Lord would reveal your daily dependence on Him or reflect on your freedom to bring even the most basic requests to Him. You could also pray for those without daily bread.

The Lord’s Prayer nicely divides into seven petitions, so you could focus on one petition each day for a week. This will also help you keep your prayer life balanced between different types of prayer. Consider also praying this prayer in a group, focusing on the pronouns “we,” “our,” “us.” You could also sing the Lord’s Prayer or listen to a recording of one of the several musical variations of this prayer.
Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen. —The Book of Worship

It’s quite common for people to close a prayer with the phrase “in Jesus’ name.” This is certainly a fitting conclusion to prayer, but it’s also possible to say this phrase without really thinking about all that it means.

For one thing, to act “in the name of” someone is to do an action as that person would perform it. For example, ambassadors act on behalf of their country and have been authorized by their heads of state to do certain things. Similarly, to pray in the name of Jesus is to pray as Jesus would pray—according to His will and under His authority. Today’s passage from 1 John states this connection quite clearly.

Many scholars have pointed out that the privilege of asking whatever we wish in Jesus’ name is integrally tied to remaining, or abiding, in Jesus. Much of John 14–16, Jesus’ final words to His disciples, stresses the need to obey Jesus’ Word and remain in Him. Prayer and obedience are woven together.

Perhaps you’ve had someone tell you that concluding a prayer with “in Jesus’ name” somehow guarantees the answer to your prayer. Some have even wondered if God honors prayers that don’t end with this phrase. Such an understanding of prayer can border on the manipulative or superstitious and seems to miss out on the privilege and responsibility that come with praying in Jesus’ name.

Look back over today’s passages from John and 1 John. Note how each occurrence of praying in the name of Jesus is used. How is Jesus’ relationship with the Father described? How are prayer and God’s will linked? How are prayer and obedience linked? Is praying in the name of Jesus a “blank check,” as some people have suggested?

Because He loves us, God wants us to come to Him with all of our petitions; because we love Him, we want to pray and act according to His will. Bingham Hunter suggests four questions to ask regarding our prayers that help to identify our motives. Do our prayers seek God’s glory? Are they grounded in the truth of the Bible? Are they offered in obedience to God’s will with a willingness to act obediently? Are we praying for something Jesus Himself would pray for? Today might be a good day to consider how your prayers align with the Lord’s will.
Each day for the next two weeks, we will consider a different type of prayer, although most prayers combine many types. We begin today with praise, because other types of prayer often lead to praise and worship of our Lord.

As you read through today’s psalms, you may have noticed that the focus was on the character of God—who He is. Tomorrow, we will look at thanksgiving prayers, which tend to focus on the work of God—what He does. Clearly, however, praise and thanksgiving are intertwined, as today’s passage from Revelation shows. It’s hard to separate praise for God’s glory from thanksgiving for the Lamb’s sacrifice!

Praises often extol the wonders of God’s name, virtues, and faithfulness. Since we were made to praise God, it’s not surprising that our spirits are uplifted when we do so. Numerous “outbursts” of praise throughout the Bible show that praise is one of the distinguishing marks of true believers. No wonder the Psalms exhort us to praise the Lord!

If so, praise the Lord with your own song of praise.

We sing the greatness of our God / That made the mountains rise, That spread the flowing seas abroad / And built the lofty skies. We sing the wisdom that ordained / The sun to rule the day; The moon shines full at His command, And all the stars obey.

There’s not a plant or flower below / But makes Thy glories known; And clouds arise and tempests blow / By order from Thy throne, While all that borrows life from Thee / Is ever in Thy care, And everywhere that man can be, Thou, God, art present there. Amen.

—Isaac Watts
Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us . . . and we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful . . . through Jesus Christ our Lord . . . Amen.—The Book of Common Prayer

It seems that one of the hardest things to teach children—and adults—is to say “thank you.” Modern advertising doesn’t help. Have you ever considered how ads usually prompt dissatisfaction with what we have and direct our focus on what we don’t have?

Ingratitude characterizes the fallen human condition. Consider the account of the ten lepers whom Jesus healed in Luke 17:11–19. Although Jesus healed ten men, only one returned to thank Him—a fact that Jesus found quite remarkable (vv. 12–18). Even though the other nine were healed physically, they missed the spiritual blessing that came to the one with a grateful heart.

As we said yesterday, it is hard to separate thanksgiving from praise—when we remember specific gifts from the Lord, we naturally start to worship Him. Psalm 136 is a good illustration of this. Like the healed leper who was grateful, we find spiritual blessing when we learn to be thankful.

**APPLY THE WORD**

Someone once said, “The key to life is to be thankful.” There’s much truth in these simple words!

Thankfulness can correct bad attitudes and redirect our focus to God. Yet, like many other disciplines, gratitude must be cultivated. Ole Hallesby suggests that believers begin with tangible things, such as food and clothing. “Begin with these things and you will notice that it will become easier for you to see and to give thanks for the spiritual gifts.”

With this in mind, thank the Lord for at least ten things in your life today, including things that you might take for granted, such as good health or a steady job. As you consider His material blessings, also thank the Lord for all that is in your life because of His gift of salvation, such as forgiveness of sins and assurance of eternal life.

Gratitude often has the effect of increasing our faith. As we thank the Lord for answered prayer, we are strengthened to bring more things to His throne of grace. Why not start a prayer log today, if you don’t already keep one. As you list specific prayer requests, leave room for future answers to these prayers.

As we said before, the Lord answers prayer according to His wisdom and timing, but prayer journals often provide a way for us to visibly see and remember the Lord’s hand in our lives. It also helps us share God’s work with others.
QUESTION AND ANSWER
by Winfred Neely and Don Cole

What does it mean to “stand in the gap” for individuals in prayer?

A gap or a breach in a city’s wall was an opening that an enemy made in order to enter the city and destroy its inhabitants. The only way to prevent the enemy from entering the city through the breach was for a warrior to risk his life and literally stand in the wall’s opening and fight back the enemy.

To “stand in the gap” means to intercede in prayer on someone’s behalf. The metaphor of standing in the gap on someone’s behalf in prayer comes from the experience of literally standing in a wall’s breach (Ps. 106:23; Ezek 13:5, 22:30). Our intercession for others means that we are joining them in fighting against spiritual enemies through prayer.

If everything happens according to God’s plan, can our prayers change anything?

Prayer by itself changes nothing, but the Lord who hears and answers prayer can change circumstances (1 Sam. 7:5–14), people (Acts 4:23–31), and, in some cases, His own dealings with people in response to prayer (Ex. 32:9–14; 2 Chron. 7:14). When we take the teaching of the entire Bible on the subject of prayer, we see that God has made the prayers of His people a part of His sovereign plan for the universe. Yes, the Lord who knows everything has, in His infinite wisdom and sovereignty, decided to respond to the prayers of His people and use their prayers as a means to advance His kingdom.

Since our omniscient and wise God places such a high value on the prayers of His people, we should give ourselves to prayer (Acts 2:42, 6:4). The Bible is replete with the stories of men and women whom God used to advance His work through prayer (1 Sam. 1:10–20; 7:9; 1 Kings 18:36–40; 2 Chron. 20:5–25; Acts 4:24–31; 12:1–19). Our God is the prayer-answering God, and our prayers matter to Him! In prayer we have the incalculable privilege to deal directly with God Himself. Consequently, prayer is one of the most powerful and effective means of grace at the disposal of the follower of the Lord Jesus. Scripture says, “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

What is the prayer of faith? If I learn how to do the prayer of faith, will I be healed?

You need to update your translation. The “prayer of faith” is better translated, “the prayer offered in faith” (James 5:15). That rendering clears up some problems...
In prayer we have the incalculable privilege to deal directly with God Himself.

with the verse. The text is part of a rich passage about prayer for one who is sick, and perhaps spiritually depressed.

Here, I make only the following statements: first, no single passage sums up all that the Bible has to say about prayer. Each passage adds something, and taken together they provide a composite picture of the subject. Second, praying in faith, or with faith, does not mean that we are convinced we will get what we request. It means that we believe God hears us and will give us what we request if it is in keeping with His will for us.

Q Why do I find it so difficult to pray? I want to begin my day with God, but when I wake up, I feel like there’s too much to do to make prayer practical.

A You, of course, are not alone. First, you have a body that doesn’t want to get out of bed, an agenda that prompts you to put it off until you can find more time at the end of the day, and that nagging feeling that maybe prayers don’t change a thing, anyway. It’s that ongoing battle that we fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil (Eph. 6:12; 1 John 2:16).

In the Garden of Eden, Adam knew what it meant to seek a conversation with God, to seek to know what He wants, and to desire to do what He wants. Since Adam and Eve fell into sin, the relationship with God has been fractured, and we find talking with God, reading the Word, and obeying it can be just plain hard work. We are fighting against our own sin nature continuously (Rom. 7:18–20).

The best answer to this problem is, to paraphrase the sneaker company, just do it. Wake up in the morning, and before you even get out of bed offer a simple greeting to God: “Good morning, God. I love You, God, and I know You love me too. God, what are You up to? Whatever it is, I want to be a part of it this morning.”

We think prayer has to be long, formal conversations. Instead it can be simple sentences offered throughout the day, giving God praise, making a confession, sharing our needs, or offering Him thanksgiving. When prayer becomes real like this, it becomes as vital to our lives as breathing. We discover it’s not a chore or burden, it’s the sweetest time in our day. “Good morning, God. I love You, God, and I know You love me, too.”
Sometimes Christians feel uncomfortable with meditation, perhaps due to New Age forms of meditation. But meditation simply means to reflect deeply on something. The Bible is filled with exhortations to meditate on God’s Word and works, and the history of the church records numerous examples of men and women who heeded this call to contemplate God’s Word. There is much we can learn from this approach to prayer that includes sustained reflection on our Lord and His Word.

For one thing, meditation is not a mindless repetition of certain phrases but an intense concentration on God and His ways. Scriptural exhortations to meditate are always directed toward God’s deeds, laws, or promises. For another thing, true meditation is not a flight from the world. Thomas Merton wrote, “Meditation has no point unless it is firmly rooted in life.”

Finally, true meditation engages both our hearts and our minds, as we learn to listen to God. “Prayer is then not just a formula of words . . . it is the orientation of our whole body, mind, and spirit to God in silence, attention, and adoration,” wrote Merton.

**APPLY THE WORD**

The psalmist exclaimed, “I meditate on [your law] all day long” (Ps. 119:97). Let’s consider several approaches to meditation.

Sometime today if possible, set aside fifteen to twenty minutes for solitude and meditation. Choose a short section of Scripture, perhaps from today’s psalm, and read it slowly several times. If distractions come up, ask the Lord for focus as you reread your chosen passage.

As you silently dwell on the passage, ask the Lord to speak to you from this passage. Try to keep focused on His Word and His presence. At the end of your time of meditation, consider writing down things the Lord may have revealed to you.

Another way to meditate on Scripture is to use your imagination to consider the feelings and thoughts of people in the passage. For example, as you read today’s passage from Joshua, imagine how it would feel to face a formidable opponent following the death of an incredible leader like Moses. How might the Lord’s promises have particularly encouraged Joshua? Why was it important for Joshua to meditate on the Book of the Law? What did the Promised Land look like?

If this approach is new to you, don’t feel discouraged if it feels awkward or futile. As with other things in life, our ability to meditate on the Lord and His Word grows with practice.
Ole Hallesby shares a significant incident in his book *Prayer*. Although his young son knew that he was not supposed to disturb his father during work hours, the boy nevertheless came into his father’s office one day and said, “Papa, dear, I will sit still all the time if you will only let me be here with you!”

For many of us, however, simply wanting to “sit still” with the Lord may not be our daily experience. We are more comfortable doing things for God and speaking to Him than simply listening to Him.

Sometimes we aren’t even sure how to listen to God. The Lord spoke to Elijah in “a gentle whisper” (v. 12), but we may prefer a great shout! Our culture suggests that “louder is better” and more important.

Yet this passage suggests that God is better heard when we are quiet. As François Fénelon wrote, “God never ceases to speak to us, but the noise of the world without and the tumult of our passions within bewilder us and prevent us from listening to him.”

**APPLY THE WORD**

We can hear the Lord in a variety of ways—directly through the ministry of the Holy Spirit or indirectly through other people or circumstances. Most often, however, we hear Him in conjunction with His Word, either through the words in the Bible itself or in prayer as we seek to understand His Word.

Although the busyness of our lives and our own fears of silence may make us feel uncomfortable to simply come before the Lord in silence, great blessing comes when we do. Find some time today, when you know you won’t be interrupted, to come quietly before the Lord, silently reading through Psalm 46.

Slowly read the psalm, waiting quietly after each line to take in what the Lord has said to you from His Word. Pause and reflect on His truth. Don’t worry if you feel silly or if you don’t “hear” anything.

In some ways, being silent before the Lord is like a human relationship: the better we know someone, the more comfortable we feel being silent with that person. Our ability to sit silently before Him increases as our relationship with Him deepens.

You may want to begin with this prayer:

*Come, Lord, and speak to my heart. Communicate to it your holy will, and mercifully work within it both to will and to do according to your good pleasure.*

—Thomas à Kempis
**I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin.**

Psalm 32:5

_O merciful heart of God, grant me yet again thy forgiveness. Hear my sorrowful tale and in thy great mercy blot it out from the book of thy remembrance. Give me faith so to lay hold of thine own holiness and so to rejoice in the righteousness of Christ my savior... Amen._

—John Baillie, A Diary of Private Prayer

True forgiveness of sin sets Christianity apart from other religions, for only Christianity teaches that God was willing to become human to pay the price for human sin forever. Not surprisingly then, confession of sin is central to the gospel, beginning with John the Baptist and continuing throughout the entire New Testament.

Confession begins with honestly acknowledging our sin. The parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) shows how eager God is to forgive and receive His children.

Consider the promise of 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

When we have sinned, prayer often seems like the last thing we want to do. That’s because sin is always against God and blocks our relationship with Him. But confession of sin, although painful, restores our relationship with Him and releases joyful praise. Notice how David ended up rejoicing after he had confessed his sin to the Lord (Ps. 32:11).

**APPLY THE WORD**

Psalm 51 records David's contrition, confession, and restoration after his sin with Bathsheba. If there is a sin in your life that needs to be confessed, consider using Psalm 51 as the basis for a prayer of confession.

First, you may want to write down the specific sin(s) for which you seek forgiveness; this will help you focus as you pray. Then pray through Psalm 51, line by line. For example, as you read of David’s cry for mercy (v. 1), make that cry your own, resting in God’s unfailing love.

As you work through the psalm, allow the Holy Spirit to speak His truth into your heart and cleanse and restore you. Consider also sharing your confession with another person—notice the communal nature of Psalm 51.

Written prayers, such as the following one from _The Book of Common Prayer_, are also quite helpful.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen.
**Christ Jesus, you did not come to earth to judge the world but so that through you, the Risen Lord, every human being might be saved and reconciled. And when the love that forgives burns with a Gospel flame, the heart, even when beset by trials, can begin to live again.**

—Taizé, Prayer for Each Day

Clearly God takes forgiveness of sin quite seriously! If He was willing to send His Son to die on the cross, we can be certain that we should also take seriously His command to be forgiving of one another. Indeed, Scripture teaches that an unwillingness to forgive and show compassion on our part hinders our own ability to receive forgiveness from the Lord (Matt. 6:14) and hinders our prayers (1 Peter 3:7). “Hostility and an unforgiving spirit are acids which destroy our capacity to worship and pray,” writes Bingham Hunter.

The parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:23–35) drives home this point. The miraculous cancellation of the servant’s debt should have prompted similar charity in his actions with others (vv. 32–33). Instead, his hardness of heart brought on severe consequences, underscoring the need for forgiveness in human relationships (v. 34). Similarly, the account of the woman who had been forgiven much shows the powerful correlation between forgiveness and love (Luke 7:44–48).

**APPLY THE WORD**

When a person is deeply wronged, forgiveness can be difficult. Here are a few steps that may help on the journey to forgiveness and healing. First, acknowledge that sin is evil, and allow yourself to grieve. Second, look to the cross as the place where all sin has been dealt with. Finally, remember all that Jesus has forgiven you and pray for release through forgiveness for the transgressions committed against you.

“The hatred . . . which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class; Father, forgive. . . . Our envy . . . of the welfare and happiness of others; Father, forgive. Our indifference . . . to the plight of the homeless and the refugee; Father, forgive. The lust . . . which uses for ignoble ends, the bodies of men and women; Father, forgive. The pride . . . which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God; Father, forgive.”

—A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants
Children learn to ask their parents for things. Some requests, such as a glass of water before bed, usually are granted; other requests, such as staying up all night, usually are not. In a similar way, Christians come to understand that they can ask their heavenly Father for anything. Of course, some may look to God only for things, as if God were some heavenly genie, but most believers rightly understand that petitionary prayer is a privilege of God’s children. (In petition, we ask God concerning ourselves; in intercession—see Days 23 and 24—we ask God on behalf of others.)

Our Father wants us to petition Him: “Ask and it will be given to you” and “. . . how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matt. 7:7, 11). Richard Foster calls petition “our staple diet.”

Petition is rooted in God’s goodness—recall our study on Day 6. Resting in God’s goodness also helps us accept unanswered requests. Consider Paul’s petitions in 2 Corinthians—unanswered prayer fostered maturity in Paul and brought glory to the Lord.

Petitionary prayer reveals our dependence on God and deepens our intimacy with Him. This explains why we need to ask Him for things He already knows we need. The act of asking draws us to Him and pleases Him.

Because petitionary prayer is not just about getting something from God, bringing our requests before God can strengthen our faith and purify our hearts. This last point is important because Christians sometimes worry about bringing requests before the Lord that may not be “right.”

Yet as P. T. Forsyth writes, “Petitions that are less than pure can only be purified by petition.” That’s why a prayer journal or log, such as the one suggested on Day 14, is a good tool not only for recording the Lord’s answers to our prayers but also for revealing how He is changing our hearts in the process.

Sometimes, however, anxiety or fear about a situation may hinder us from bringing our petitions to the Lord. If this applies to you, consider writing Philippians 4:6–7 on a card and carrying it with you during the day. Because confusion often accompanies anxiety, write out your anxious thoughts and translate them into petitions you can lay before the Lord.

As you pray through each request, ask God to help you fully entrust the request with Him, knowing that He delights in your coming before Him.
**Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior.**

Psalm 25:4–5

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O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment and light riseth up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what thou wouldst have us to do, that the spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in thy light we may see light, and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.—The Book of Common Prayer

Sometimes discerning God’s will is not easy. The starting point, however, is to come to the Lord in prayer. And God promises to give wisdom (James 1:5).

Prayers for guidance often concern specific decisions. God’s Word must be at the core of such decisions, for we know that God will not lead us contrary to His own Word. The counsel and prayers of mature Christians who know us well are helpful. And because the Lord often reveals His will through circumstances, we should pray for increased awareness of the Holy Spirit’s leading.

God’s guidance also means complete surrender. Consider Hannah Whitall Smith’s words: “Remember that our God has all knowledge and all wisdom, and that therefore it is very possible He may guide you into paths wherein He knows great blessings are awaiting you, but which . . . seem sure to result in confusion and loss.”

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**APPLY THE WORD**

In his book on prayer, Bingham Hunter lists six steps that help as we pray for God’s guidance. First, beware of the media’s role in clouding our understanding of God’s will, particularly how the media often confuses needs and wants. Second, make Bible reading and study a priority. Third, take seriously the need for obedience. “Basic Christian obedience is essential to praying according to God’s will.” Fourth, keep in mind that God’s will for your life is not the same as His will for other people’s lives. Fifth, learn from others, especially more mature Christians. And finally, pray for others and ask them to pray for you.

As you work through these six steps, remember God’s promise in James 1:5 to provide wisdom to those who ask. You may want to include some time praying through Psalm 25 or the following prayer for guidance.

O Lord, you know me. You know when I sit and when I stand. You have me always present in your mind. For this, Lord, I thank you. You know the path for my life and what is best for me. Lord, reveal to me the path I am to walk. Bless me and guide me and be Lord to me so that whichever road I take I may do all for your glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

—“Vocation Prayer” from the Beech Grove Benedictine Community
Then I called on the name of the LORD: “LORD, save me!”

Psalm 116:4

Write thy blessed name, O Lord, upon my heart, there to remain so indelibly engraven, that no prosperity, no adversity shall ever move me from thy love. Be thou to me a strong tower of defense, a comforter in tribulation, a deliverer in distress, a very present help in trouble, and a guide to heaven through the many temptations and dangers in this life. Amen.—Thomas à Kempis

Psalm 40 contains striking references to enemies and their destruction (vv. 14–15). Many psalmists often faced physical death, so it’s not surprising to find bold prayers for protection in the Psalms. We may not face such harrowing physical experiences, but our lives are filled with nonphysical enemies that plague us, such as depression, anger, lust, fear, and bitterness.

The stark portrayal of enemies and the confidence in the Lord’s deliverance make the Psalms a prayer book for those who seek protection, whether from physical dangers, emotional threats, or spiritual enemies.

Consider the pattern set forth in Psalm 116. The psalmist begins by praising the Lord for hearing his prayer (vv. 1–2). He then describes the life-threatening danger (v. 3) that led him to call on the Lord (v. 4). The Lord’s deliverance brings forth praise (vv. 5–11). Finally, the experience of God’s faithfulness prompts the psalmist to deeper obedience and service (vv. 12–19).

APPLY THE WORD

The most effective prayers for protection need not be long. Consider the simple “Lord, save me!” recorded in today’s verse and uttered by millions throughout the ages. Often in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances, this is all we can truly pray. In such times, the Lord’s promise “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20) is a profound assurance.

How has God protected or delivered you in the past? Consider using these experiences as the basis for your own psalm praising God for His protection. Perhaps you are experiencing a trial at this time and you desire the Lord’s protection as you travel or face a treacherous situation at work. The Psalms are really songs—you could write your prayer as a song to God, asking for His protection and deliverance. The following prayer may also help give words to your prayer.

Speak to me, that I may hear thee giving me courage for hard times and strength for difficult places; giving me determination for challenging tasks. I ask of thee no easy way, but just thy grace that is sufficient for every need, so that no matter how hard the way, how challenging the hour, how dark the sky, I may be enabled to overcome. In thy strength, who has overcome the world, I make this prayer. Amen.

—U.S. Senate Chaplain Peter Marshall
There is a growing recognition in the medical community of the role of prayer in physical healing. Many medical professionals who have no other explanation for a patient’s recovery are willing to credit prayer.

As Christians, we shouldn’t be surprised by this close connection—today’s passage from 2 Kings records one such healing, and Jesus’ incarnational ministry was filled with healings. Also, the Gospels show that physical and spiritual healing may be closely connected.

In her book *The Healing Presence*, Leanne Payne describes healing prayer as a means by which God’s command to be made new can be received by the soul. “Healing prayer is not the ‘instant fix,’ nor the bypassing of slow and steady growth.” Thus, confession of sin and a commitment to obedience are essential. Yet healing prayer can break through the delusions of sin and give us the power to walk into the wholeness of being we were intended to have.

Foster outlines four steps for healing prayer, appropriate for both emotional and physical healing. First, *listen*. “We listen to people, and we listen to God” for more discernment. Second, *pray*. “This is the step of faith. As we come to clearness about what is needed, we invite God’s healing to come.” Third, *believe*. “This is the step of assurance. . . . We focus on [his] trustworthiness and especially on his steadfast love.” Fourth, *give thanks*. “This is the step of gratitude. . . . Gratitude is often very powerful.”

If you seek healing, consider also asking the elders of your church to pray for you, as outlined in James 5:14–15.

Today’s opening prayer is yet another approach to healing—invoking the strong name of Jesus and appealing to the One who has complete authority over all evil forces that wage war against us. If you are experiencing spiritual oppression, consider praying through this prayer, recognizing that evil forces have no legitimate claim on you.
O Lord, You lover of souls, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, I bring before You in my prayers all those who are lonely in this world. Yours they are, and none can pluck them out of Your hand. . . . For Your love’s sake. Amen.
—Little Book of Prayers

“When we say to people, ‘I will pray for you,’ we make a very important commitment,” writes Henri Nouwen. “The sad thing is that this remark often remains nothing but a well-meant expression of concern.” Intercessory prayer—prayer for others—is an important commitment and a profound way to love.

The greatest model of intercession we have is Jesus. Today’s passage from John shows us that He prayed for us during His time on earth, and Hebrews 7:25 says that He always lives to intercede for us. We also have the Holy Spirit, who intercedes for us, translating our wordless prayers into petitions according to God’s will (Rom. 8:26–27).

Intercessory prayer is vital for unity in the body. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me.” Intercession is also a practical way to love our enemies, just as Matthew 5:44 commands us.

**Appl Y the Word**

Today’s passage from Timothy urges prayer for everyone—that’s pretty inclusive! Tomorrow we will discuss prayer for those in authority; today we focus on individuals in our lives.

Lists can be quite helpful for intercession, either to record petitions or to ensure that you don’t overlook individuals you wish to support in prayer, such as neighbors and coworkers. If you have children, ask them to make their own prayer lists for their friends and others in their lives. Also, many churches list prayer needs in the weekly bulletin or keep track of prayer requests in the church office. Consider bringing these petitions to the Lord as a family.

As with thanksgiving and petitionary prayer (see Days 14 and 19), a prayer journal can assist intercession and underscore the Lord’s faithfulness.

Many have found the following approach to intercession helpful. In addition to daily prayers for immediate family and close friends, dedicate each day of the week to specific individuals. For example, on Sunday, you might pray for extended family; on Monday, missionaries; on Tuesday, Christian leaders; on Wednesday, your church body; on Thursday, neighbors; on Friday, coworkers; on Saturday, government officials. Try to make your prayers specific, informed by prayer letters, church bulletins, news events, and so on.
It’s not always easy to know how to pray for “all those in authority.” Sometimes we can get so frustrated with political issues and leaders that we don’t feel like praying at all! The prayers of the priest Ezra and the prophet Daniel, both of whom insightfully prayed for their nation, are instructive.

Both Ezra and Daniel sought the Lord on behalf of their people’s sins. Ezra acknowledged that this sin was completely inexcusable in light of God’s faithfulness (vv. 8–10), yet he appealed to God’s mercy (vv. 13–15). Following Daniel’s lengthy confession of corporate sin—interspersed with declarations of God’s glorious character (vv. 4, 7, 9, 12)—he prayed that the Lord might look favorably on His “desolate sanctuary” (v. 17).

Ezra and Daniel both focused their prayers on the spiritual condition of the people and God’s character. The emphasis was not so much specific issues but the upholding of God’s honor and glory.

**APPLY THE WORD**

When we consider praying for our own country, many of us might not begin with confession of sin.

Yet humbly coming before the Lord, acknowledging the ways we have failed in our witness to our society, is a good place to start and keeps us from judging others in their sin.

As Ezra and Daniel did, we can use God’s character as the basis of our prayers. For example, we can pray that our elected officials uphold God’s justice and that they rule with integrity and honor.

In order to pray for those in authority over us, however, we need to know who they are! Make a list of those “in authority” where you live today. Your public library or official government Web sites can help you identify federal, state, and local elected officials. Find out some additional information on these individuals, such as what their previous occupations were or what their particular concerns are, to inform your prayers.

Consider assigning one day a week to pray for those who govern you, perhaps as outlined yesterday. You may also want to pray for our nation during a weekly Bible study or cell group. Prayer books, such as *The Book of Common Prayer*, contain prayers for the nation, social justice, education, the president, Congress, the courts, the armed forces, and so on. Your prayers can be a powerful influence in our nation!
In his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Donald Whitney calls fasting “the most feared and misunderstood of all the spiritual disciplines.” This is particularly true in our culture that avoids almost any form of self-denial. Yet Scripture contains many examples of fasting: David, Esther, Daniel, Jesus, and Paul all fasted on occasion. Today’s passage from Zechariah, however, stresses that fasting without the proper heart was displeasing to the Lord (v. 5; cf. Matt. 6:16–18).

Some people fast to increase clarity in prayer. Both Ezra (8:23) and the early church (Acts 13:2) fasted when they sought guidance. Sometimes people fast to express grief, as David did over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. Donald Whitney lists additional reasons for fasting: to seek deliverance or protection, to express repentance, to humble oneself before the Lord, to overcome temptation, and to dedicate oneself to the Lord.

Other believers fast as a means of reminding themselves how much Christ suffered or to increase their appreciation of the good gifts God so freely gives.

**APPLY THE WORD**

As you look at scriptural examples of fasting or read about the experience of believers who fast, it becomes clear that fasting has nothing to do with influencing God or “pressuring” Him to answer our prayers. Instead, fasting increases our awareness of the Lord and our ability to follow Him wholeheartedly.

Many people think of fasting only as abstaining from all food and drink for a specific time. Although we find this kind of fasting in the Bible, it usually accompanies extreme trials, such as the planned destruction of the Jews in Esther or Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness.

Actually there are many different approaches to fasting. Many people set aside twenty-four hours during which time they will not eat, but they may drink fruit juice. They commit to pray when they would normally be eating; some even donate the money they would have spent on food to a local charity. Others follow a partial fast, perhaps eating only vegetables. Still others fast by avoiding a particular food or activity, such as watching TV. This break from the normal routine serves as summons to come before the Lord in prayer.

If you’ve never thought about fasting, it might be good to ask your pastor or look in your local Christian bookstore to read more about it. You can also trace its practice through the Bible by looking up “fasting” in a concordance.
It’s easy to dismiss Colossians 4:2 as a nice ideal but an impossible reality. For many the idea of praying unceasingly may call to mind desert hermits or medieval monks—an image hopelessly out of sync with everyday pressures. Today’s prayer, however, was uttered by a very busy man who wanted to experience God’s presence, even in his work place.

After years as a soldier and household servant, Nicholas Herman joined a Parisian monastery in 1666. Herman, better known as Brother Lawrence, worked in the kitchen as “the lord of all pots and pans.” Brother Lawrence’s passionate love for Christ made him determine to live each day in the continual presence of God.

“The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer,” wrote Brother Lawrence. “No task was too trivial for Brother Lawrence, for he was able to transform the mundane chores of the kitchen into glorious experiences of heaven,” writes Richard Foster.

**APPLY THE WORD**

Brother Lawrence’s approach is simple. Having first filled his mind with thoughts of God in private prayer, he proceeded to his work in the monastery’s kitchen. “There . . . he spent all the intervals of this time, as well before and after his work, in prayer. . . . As he proceeded in his work he continued his familiar conversation with his Maker, imploring his grace, and offering to him all his actions.”

Although his first attempts were difficult, Brother Lawrence eventually developed a “habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God.” Many others, such as Oswald Chambers, Frank Laubach, C. S. Lewis, and Mother Teresa, have described similar approaches.

Why not conduct a “prayer experiment” over the next few days? Using external prompts, such as your favorite color or notes posted throughout the house, utter short, one-sentence prayers of thanksgiving to your heavenly Father each time you see the prompt.

When you become aware of needs or feel anxious about something, try one-word prayers, such as “safety” or “health.” As you proceed, try to become more aware of Jesus’ presence. Keep note of what the Lord brings to mind and how you sense His presence. Although a few days isn’t much time, see if you can begin to develop the habit of continual conversation with the Lord.
We have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way.

—Colossians 1:9–10

Paul’s prayers for the believers in churches that he planted are filled with blessing and thanksgiving. Today we’ll consider a few of these prayers.

In Ephesians 3, we see that Paul began by praying for power for the Ephesian believers—the power to remain rooted in their faith (vv. 16–17) and to comprehend more fully the love of Christ, in all its glorious dimensions (v. 18).

Then Paul prayed that the deep knowledge of Christ’s love would lead to spiritual maturity (v. 19). Amazed by God’s power to transform lives, it’s no wonder Paul ended by praising God (vv. 20–21).

Love and knowledge are also the bases of Paul’s prayers for the Philippians. After thanking God for the Philippians’ participation in the gospel (vv. 3–5), Paul prayed that their love of God would grow in all knowledge and insight, so that they might be able to live holy lives until Christ’s return (vv. 9–11).

These powerful prayers not only blessed their recipients, they have become a legacy for generations of believers.

APPLY THE WORD

One of the remarkable things about Paul’s prayers is how he focused on the spiritual well-being and blessing of those for whom he prayed, not necessarily trying to “fix” specific problems in their lives. Paul knew that spiritual maturity was the key thing to pray for—everything else flows from this foundation.

You could use Paul’s prayers to write out a prayer for your children or grandchildren, or other children whom God has placed in your life. Written prayers are a great legacy to give to the next generation.

Look carefully at today’s Scripture readings—as well as Colossians 1:3–12—and rewrite these prayers for individuals in your life. Key items to include are gratitude for the person and a petition for deeper knowledge of God and His love and power. Consider ending your prayer with a benediction.

If children are your focus, you may want to incorporate elements from the following prayer by Jeremy Taylor, a seventeenth-century bishop. “Bless our children with healthful bodies, with good understandings, with the graces and gifts of your spirit, with sweet dispositions and holy habits; and sanctify them throughout in their bodies, souls, and spirits, and keep them unblamable to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
As we’ve seen, prayer is communication with our loving Father—the means by which we know Him better and bring before Him our concerns and desires. But prayer is also a way that God changes us.

Ephesians 4 tells us to put off the old life apart from God and put on “the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (vv. 22–24). Prayer and God’s Word, through the work of the Holy Spirit, are the primary ways this transformation occurs.

One way that prayer changes us is by increasing humility. Whether we are praying for “daily bread” or interceding for others, prayer increases our awareness of being totally dependent on the Lord.

Prayer also changes our focus—from the frenzy of daily life to the eternal truths in Christ. As we come into the presence of God, He reveals the deceptions that blind us, such as an unforgiving heart or self-sufficiency, and restores our relationship with Him. Thus we are changed as we come to God in prayer, but we are also changed by specifically asking the Lord to change us.

APPLY THE WORD

Most of us earnestly desire to put on the new self, just as we desire to see more of the Spirit’s fruit in our lives. It’s surprising, then, how often we try to bring about spiritual growth on our own and forget to pray for it! Why not take time today to do just that?

You may want to begin by assessing hindrances to inner growth in your life. The aim of this exercise is not introspection, but rather the opportunity to prayerfully consider how each item in the following list either strengthens or weakens God’s new creation within you. Think of it as a “spiritual spring cleaning.” As you pray through this list, you may want to write down thoughts that the Lord brings to your mind.

- the books you read and the movies and TV shows that you watch
- the anecdotes and jokes that are shared where you work
- the focus of your imagination or thought life
- the friends you spend time with

Now ponder each of the nine fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5 and ask the Holy Spirit for an increase of each in your life. End this time by praising the Lord for the promise of Philippians 1:6: “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”
All through this day, O Lord, by the powering of thy quickening Spirit, let me touch the lives of others for good, whether through the word I speak, the prayer I speak, or the life I live.

—Anonymous

Yesterday we focused on inner change that comes with prayer; today we will look at outward fruit. As prayer shifts our focus upward to the Lord, there is often an accompanying shift outward through serving others.

The parable of the Good Samaritan wonderfully portrays a life ready for service. Whereas the priest (v. 31) and the Levite (v. 32) focused on their own priorities, the Samaritan set aside his plans and helped the wounded robbery victim without reservation (vv. 33–35).

Our relationship with Christ enables us to serve with similar abandon—in fact, we’re already gifted to do so. Today’s verse reminds us that all believers have received spiritual gifts vital to the rest of the body and God’s kingdom work. Look through the list of spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, and notice how each is outward-focused for the benefit of others.

Prayer is an essential part of this life of service. It is only as we seek the Lord’s direction that we can be obedient to serve where and how He desires. Also, intercessory prayer is a vital way that we serve one another.

**APPLY THE WORD**

A life of service is more an attitude than a particular ministry. In fact, we are called to serve right where we are—in our homes, neighborhoods, and jobs. Bob and Michael Benson counsel, “Ask God to help you this week to see the tasks of your life not as opportunities for advancement . . . [but] as places where you have been called to serve . . .”

Perhaps you have never identified your spiritual gifts. Your pastor or Bible study leader may be able to assist you or provide a study guide to help discover them. If you already know your spiritual gifts, ask the Lord how they can be more fully used at home, work, and church.

The famous prayer of St. Francis of Assisi helps cultivate a heart ready to serve:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace! Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.
O Lord Jesus Christ, who are the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we pray you not to let us stray from you, who are the Way, nor to distrust you, who are the Truth, nor to rest in any other thing than you, who are the Life. Teach us by your Holy Spirit what to believe, what to do . . . Amen.

—Erasmus

May the words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 19:14

So far we have considered attitudes that help prayer, types of prayer, and the fruit of prayer. Today and tomorrow we will consider several models that help to integrate these ideas.

One model of prayer uses a passage of Scripture to organize our prayers and focus our meditation. During the first step, you read through a selected Scripture passage several times. Next, you meditate on the passage and pray for the Holy Spirit’s illumination. God speaks to us through His Word, through His Spirit. He will help us if we ask.

After you meditate on the truth of God’s Word, pray to the Lord with your response to His Word—your confession of sin, expressions of thanksgiving and worship, and prayerful requests. Focus your prayer on the truths of the passage you have read.

Finally, conclude your meditation by deeply and mindfully contemplating the Scripture passage throughout the day. Continue to ask the Lord how to act on this part of His Word.

APPLY THE WORD

In many monastic orders, individuals were appointed to read the Scripture continuously throughout the day—most of us will only have twenty to thirty minutes. Fortunately, that is enough time to sample this method of reading over, meditating on, and praying through Scripture.

You can begin a scripture prayer with Psalm 23. First, read through the psalm for several minutes. Ask yourself: “What does this text say?” Next, spend at least five minutes meditating on this passage, asking yourself: “What does this text say to me?” For example, what does it feel like to walk alongside quiet waters? What is the “valley of the shadow of death” in your own life? How can the Lord’s rod and staff comfort you? Allow your mind to engage in some sanctified imagination as you put yourself into this psalm.

At the end of this time, spend another five minutes in prayer, asking yourself: “What can I say back to the Lord from this text?” You may want to write out your responses. When you have finished this, spend several minutes quietly in the Lord’s presence. Finally, consider any action this passage has prompted or any challenges you need to consider further.

If you are in a small group or Bible study, scripture prayers are a great group activity that often leads to meaningful sharing and rich time of prayer.
For whatever reasons, we all find ourselves neglecting prayer at times, perhaps from the pressures of the day or thinking we have to pray in a certain way. Hopefully, this month’s study has sparked a deeper desire to pray by recognizing the great privilege we have to converse with our heavenly Father, even if we’re angry, frustrated, or don’t feel like talking!

Although much of our emphasis this month has been on individual prayer, one of the best ways to grow in prayer is to pray with others. Consider finding another person who also has a desire to grow in prayer. You may meet with your “prayer partner” daily or weekly, in person or on the phone, for a walk or for a cup of coffee—the possibilities are endless! Consider also more ways to bring prayer into family time.

Praying with others is also one of the best ways to persevere in prayer. Perhaps you could join—or start!—a group to pray for your church prior to the Sunday morning service.

Another way to grow in prayer is to draw on the many rich resources of written prayers. The Psalms, rightly called the “prayer book of the church,” can often express the prayer of your heart when your own words can’t. You may also consider denominational prayer books, such as the Book of Common Prayer.

Many classics, such as Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis or St. Ignatius’s Spiritual Exercises, contain many prayer exercises. Some missionary organizations publish daily prayer guides that enable you to pray “around the world.”

You may also consider praying through hymns or using music in your prayer time, taking prayer walks, or changing your posture to standing or kneeling when you pray.

Finally, there are many outstanding books on prayer, some of which have been referenced in this study. Your local Christian bookstore can assist you in finding them.

Our walk with the Lord is an exciting adventure—prayer is part of that journey. Don’t get discouraged along the way! Keep in mind what an early monk said, “If you want to pray, you are already praying.” Or consider John Wesley’s words:

Pray, just as you are led, without reasoning, in all simplicity. Be a little child, hanging on him that loves you.
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I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed.

Romans 8:18