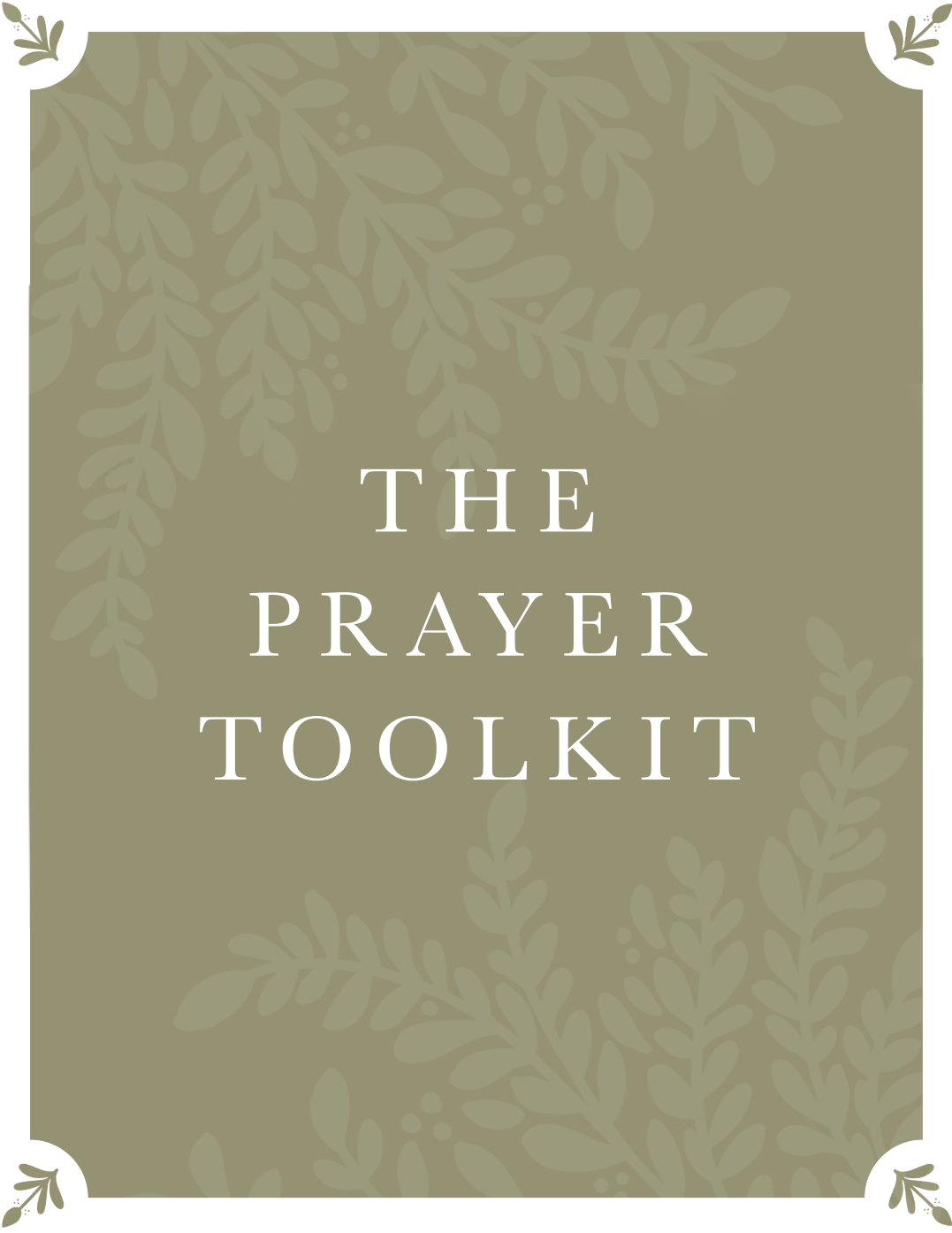


HOSANNA
Revival



THE
PRAYER
TOOLKIT

ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

Whether you have just begun your journey of following Jesus or have been a Christian for many years, you have likely had questions about prayer. Perhaps you have struggled with understanding why we pray. You may wonder, *Does God always hear every prayer? Does prayer change God's mind? What's the point of praying if God knows everything?* Or maybe you fully understand why you pray, but have a hard time with a consistent prayer life.

Wherever you are, this guide is for you. In this toolkit, we will discuss what prayer is (and isn't), struggles we encounter when praying, and how to practice prayer as a spiritual discipline. Let's get started!

A NOTE FROM KATIE

If I were sitting next to you as you tackle the giant topic of prayer, I would want you to know a few things.

First, I would tell you that I am overjoyed you are trying to make change in your prayer life. It's so easy to settle into "good enough" when something is hard, confusing, or unfamiliar.

Second, I would tell you that communing with the God of the universe through prayer is one of the most important things you will do to grow your faith, and strengthen your relationship with God. No relationship thrives on weak, inconsistent, and inauthentic communication. Why would we expect our relationship with God to be any different?

As you commit to improving your discipline of prayer by one small step or a massive overhaul, I pray that you will feel strengthened. Know that God wants this change for you even more than you do. Prayer is modeled for us all over the Bible as a necessary but beautiful gift from God- and your commitment to commune with him consistently and passionately will draw you near to the Lord, leading to only more goodness and glory.



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WHAT IS PRAYER?

If we boiled prayer down to three words, it would probably be “talking with God.” That’s a true and good definition, but it lacks some clarity. The Westminster Larger Catechism answers this question like this:

“Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of his Spirit; with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.”¹

Using this as a working definition, we can break prayer down into three main sections:

1. Prayer is communicating with God
2. Prayer is coming to God in the name of Christ
3. Prayer is enabled by the Holy Spirit

Let’s work through this definition of prayer one point at a time.

¹ *Westminster Larger Catechism, question 178. Public Domain.*

*What is Prayer?***PRAYER IS COMMUNICATING WITH GOD**

Some might describe prayer as “meditation” or “thoughts about God” (and it certainly can include those things), but it is so much more. Prayer is coming before our Father in heaven (Matthew 6:9-13), expressing our heart’s deepest needs to him. In a sense, prayer is a recognition and confession of our dependence on God. People who believe that they need nothing don’t pray. And if they do pray (without an understanding of their dependence on God), they are not communicating with God, but are like the Pharisee in Luke 18, who thought he was praying, but was only “praying to himself” (Luke 18:11).

The Bible describes prayer as sweet-smelling incense offered to God (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3-4). In the Scripture, prayer is often a cry to God for help (Psalm 34:6, 17). It is casting all your cares and anxieties on God, knowing that he cares for you deeply (1 Peter 5:7). In short, prayer is making your needs known to God—all your needs—regardless of how big or small they may seem.

In Matthew 6, Jesus taught his disciples to begin their prayers by remembering God as their “Father in heaven.” This is a beautiful description of God—a loving Father who desires to hear from his children (we’ll talk about the Lord’s Prayer a little bit later) and provide for their needs. Prayer is communicating your desires to God, who is your Father in heaven.

PRAYER IS COMING TO GOD IN THE NAME OF CHRIST

Prayer is a unique privilege for those who have trusted in Jesus. Apart from Jesus, we could never hope to stand before the throne of a holy God, because we are “strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in this world” (Ephesians 2:12). In other words, without Jesus, we have no hope of any access to a perfect and holy God. But to those who love Jesus and follow him, we are covered in his righteousness—we bear his name. When we pray in the name of Jesus, we have every access to God. Every wall has been torn down and every barrier has been removed—we get to enter boldly into the holy place of the presence of God (Hebrews 10:19, 4:16)—like a child, completely unafraid to approach their dad.

Every time we pray in the name of Jesus according to God’s will (John 14:13; 1 John 5:14), Jesus intercedes on our behalf (Hebrews 7:25). In 1742, prolific hymn writer Charles Wesley wrote these words in a hymn titled “Arise, My Soul Arise”:

The Father hears him pray:

his dear anointed One;

He cannot turn away

the presence of his Son!

We can come before God with bold, expectant faith because we know he will hear our prayers for the sake of his Son.

PRAYER IS ENABLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

It may not always seem like it, but prayer is a supernatural event. The fact that anyone, anywhere can pray in the name of Jesus and hold the attention of the God of the universe is an incredible thought. But that's exactly what's happening when we pray! The Bible teaches that when we believe in Jesus as he is offered in the gospel, our hearts are made new and we are adopted into the family of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:15).

The reason we pray to God as our Father is because the Holy Spirit of God has made us the children of God! We now have the right to call God our Father and to bring our deepest needs and desires to him—in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is a divine, supernatural act in which all three members of the Trinity are involved to allow us to communicate directly with God.

The Holy Spirit not only enables us to pray to God, but he helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us when we do not have words to pray (Romans 8:26). Professor and author Dr. Barry York said it this way: “The Holy Spirit is the very breath of [our] prayers.”

To summarize: Prayer is knowing that God's ear is listening to every heart-cry of his children because Jesus' work on the cross has made a way for us to come boldly before him, with the Holy Spirit's breath helping us communicate directly with God—even when we don't know what to pray.

*What is Prayer?***WHAT PRAYER IS NOT**

While it's important to consider what prayer is, it is also important to consider what prayer is not. Because prayer is a gracious gift, we should be careful not to misrepresent or misuse prayer.

**Prayer is
Not a Magic
Formula**

If we're not careful with how we handle Scripture, we can take things out of context and twist their true meanings. For example, in John 14:14, Jesus said, "If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it." That's a big, bold promise of Jesus, and all Christians should believe it with their whole heart. However, we have to be careful not to forget about the rest of the Bible. This verse does not mean to promise that Jesus will *always* give you *everything* you want just because you asked for it. The Scriptures say much more about prayer that we must also consider when we're making our requests known to God. You cannot pray "in Jesus' name" *against* the will of God. Jesus is God. He is not divided against himself. This is why John (who wrote John 14:14) *also* wrote 1 John 5:15, which says, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything **according to his will** he hears us." Praying in Jesus' name means we pray for things that will honor and glorify Jesus—true prayer is in agreement with God's will.

**Prayer is Not
a Bargaining
Tool**

While I don't think many of us have ever intentionally tried to manipulate God, our prayers can sometimes venture into this territory. Have you ever prayed something like, "God, if you do this for me, I will _____"? There are times when genuine prayers—prayed in Jesus' name and for the glory of God—are prayed like this.

In 1 Samuel, we meet a woman named Hannah, who had no children. She prayed fervently for years that God would give her a son. She promised God that if he gave her a son, she would "give him to the LORD all the days of his life" (1 Samuel 1:11). God heard Hannah's prayers and granted her a son. The first chapter of 1 Samuel ends with the famous verse, "For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him" (1 Samuel 1:27).

Sometimes, however, we use prayers like this in selfish ways that do not honor or glorify Christ. To use a silly example: if you procrastinated all week for a test, then pray, "God if you help me pass this test, I will study next time" when you *know* you're not going to try any harder next time, you're probably going to fail your test—and it won't be on God. Prayer cannot manipulate God—he is the sovereign king of the universe.

**Prayer is Not
Worthless**

You may be thinking, “Well, if God won’t help me ace a test, what good is prayer?” Prayer is never worthless—it’s a matter of the heart. If you desire to glorify God with your life, the desires you have will be aligned with his heart (Psalm 37:4). No prayer is too small when prayed in genuine faith, even a prayer for a test. Whether you’re seeking God’s help for a new job, an apartment, a relationship...nothing is too insignificant. Prayer is never worthless.

WHY PRAY?

Regardless of where you are on your journey with Jesus, finding purpose in prayer is a common struggle. *Why* do we pray? In this section, we hope to teach you the value of consistent prayer and provide fresh perspective and motivation to your prayer time.

This list is not exhaustive, but we hope the following answers will serve to help you understand *why* we pray.

*Why Pray #1***TO PURSUE INTIMACY WITH GOD**

We often think of prayer as a good way to get what we want from God. A closer look at Scripture, however, reveals that as we grow in the Lord, we understand that prayer is not so much about getting something *from* God, but rather getting more *of* God. Prayer is communion with God! It is an intimate time of communing with our Father in heaven. When you think of a best friend or even a really good friend, you probably think of someone you speak to often. For some of us, it's someone we speak to every single day, and that makes sense—you can't be close to someone you never speak to. God is our Father, and he loves to hear from his children.

In Psalm 141:2 the psalmist writes, “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you.” In Revelation 5:8 and Revelation 8:5, we see that God truly does keep every prayer of his children in bowls—they are a sweet-smelling incense to him. Billions of prayers, prayed throughout every century since the dawn of time are kept and treasured by God our Father.

If you feel distant from God, or are uncomfortable speaking to him with such closeness, start small. Pray simple prayers (use the tips included at the end of this toolkit). Read his Word to learn more about his character and his loving heart for you. He wants to hear from you, and the more you speak to him, the more you will grow to love and trust him.

*Why Pray #2***TO LEARN OF GOD'S CHARACTER**

As you begin to cultivate the spiritual discipline of prayer and grow in your intimacy with God, you will inevitably learn more of him and his character. As you spend time with God in prayer and in his Word, the Holy Spirit will faithfully reveal to you more about God and his character. John Piper once said, “God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them.”

When you pray consistently, you will be more perceptive of God moving in your life. If you have prayed for opportunities to share Jesus with a friend who doesn't know him, you will be more likely to notice when God answers those prayers than if you hadn't prayed. God may have given you those opportunities before, but because you're praying about it, you'll be more aware of God's answers to those prayers. If you never took your requests to God in prayer, you might miss God's movement in your life—even though he is certainly moving! It's too easy for us to forget God's loving heart for us and that he is working all things together for his glory and our good.

Trusting God with your prayers also deepens your trust, as you will see God prove himself faithful time and time again. God has always been faithful, but when we're not spending time in prayer, we may miss his kind acts of faithfulness in our lives. God is faithful to provide for our needs and to answer our prayers. As you see more and more of God's faithfulness, your faith will grow, your trust will be strengthened, and your heart will become grateful, responding in praise to our good and faithful God.

*Why Pray #3***TO PLAY OUR PART IN GOD'S ORDINARY MEANS**

God has chosen to bring about his extraordinary purposes through ordinary means. We pray because we know that God is powerful and has ordained prayer as an ordinary means by which he works his extraordinary purposes. In other words, we pray because we trust God and his promises. God ordains the ends, but he does not leave the means to those ends to chance. Think of a friend who does not know Jesus. In order for that person to accept the gracious gift of salvation, a miracle is required. Their heart must be softened. Their eyes must be opened. They must be brought from death to life—salvation is no ordinary thing! And yet, God has chosen to bring about such an amazing miracle by ordinary means: the preaching of his Word, personal evangelism, prayer, etc. We pray, trusting that God can and will use something as ordinary as prayer to achieve his purposes.

*Why Pray #4***TO EXPERIENCE REVIVAL**

As you rely on the Spirit's power to respond to God in obedience, your relationship with God will grow. You will learn more of his character and learn to trust him more. Ultimately, that will lead you to *revival*. No one can spend meaningful, fruitful time with God and walk away unchanged. Prayer brings revival. Not in and of itself, but when God wants to revive his people, he brings it about through ordinary means—like prayer. Revival doesn't fall from heaven like rain or lightning bolts; it comes through ordinary things like faithfully reading God's Word and prayer.

Even if your prayers feel too big and out of reach, pray them anyway. Pray big, bold prayers. Pray until God answers or the Spirit of God points your heart in another direction. Pray with faith and expectation, trusting that if you pray in Jesus' name (John 14:13) according to God's will (1 John 5:14), he *will* hear you, and he *will* answer you in his perfect time.

*Why Pray #5***TO OBEY GOD AND HIS WORD**

If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you know there are seasons when you simply don't "feel" like praying. In those times, Scripture has many words of encouragement and exhortation—and commands. It's not a mind-blowing answer, but it is an important one: we pray because God has commanded us through his Word to pray. Praying is an act of obedience and submission to God and his Word.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul wrote that we should "pray without ceasing." In Philippians 4:16, the Bible says that we should "not be anxious about anything," but rather, in every situation, "let [our] requests be made known to God" through prayer. There are so many more Scriptures we could point to, but the simple point is this: sometimes, we pray simply to obey.

COMMON PRAYER STRUGGLES

Every Christian has seasons of struggle in their prayer life, whether they are brand-new to following Jesus or they have been following Jesus for years. Sometimes we walk through dry spells or we feel like God is no longer hearing our prayers. Maybe you feel like you just don't know *what* to pray anymore. There's not enough space here to answer every single struggle we may encounter in our prayer lives, we hope the answers below will encourage and challenge you as you grow in prayer.

*Common Prayer Struggles***WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO PRAY?**

Sometimes we simply have no words. Maybe you are completely overwhelmed by your life circumstances and you don't even know where to begin. Perhaps you have a desire to pray, but don't know the "right words" to pray. In times like these, God can feel distant and prayer can feel an unfinished "task" hanging over your head. If that sounds like you, hear this encouragement: God understands and wants to be your strength.

**Remember the
Holy Spirit's
Intercession**

When believers in Rome were facing persecution and suffering during the first century, Paul wrote to encourage them. In Romans 8:26, Paul told them that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." In other words, when we are so weak that we don't even have words to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes *for* us. He *prays* for you. What a comforting thought!

**Pray Simple
Prayers**

Just before teaching his disciples how to pray in Matthew 6, Jesus said this: "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words." Sometimes we may have the desire to pray, but we feel like our request is too small—like we shouldn't bother God with such things. We feel like prayers should be more "meaningful;" prayed with eloquence and poise. Jesus lovingly reminds us it's not all about the style or length of our prayers. One of the most sincere, heart-felt prayers in all of Scripture only contained three words: "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30).

You have the freedom to pray simply. You don't need an impressive vocabulary to pray fervent, effectual prayers. You also don't need massive, life-changing events or heartbreaking trials. God cares about the smallest, minute moments of your life, and he wants to hear from you.

Start small—begin your day with a prayer, thanking God for a new day and asking him to bless you as you move about your day. Maybe it will be something small, like hitting all green lights so you're not late to a meeting. But because you prayed over your day, you will be mindful to think of God when those things happen. You will be able to recognize small joys as gracious gifts from a loving Father, and you will be able to take a moment to offer up a prayer of thanksgiving—continuing to build a habit of constant prayer.

**Pray the
Psalms**

The Bible also contains its very own book of prayer: the Psalms. The Psalms teach us to pray through imitating the psalmist (and his God-breathed prayers) and responding to God. True prayer is always a response to God's revelation; as he reveals things to us (about his nature, about our sin, about the world), we respond in prayer.

The Psalms are also deeply personal and honest. As we read through the psalter, we will find prayers that may cause us to think, "Am I allowed to pray that?" We like things to be authentic, but we like them to be neat and pretty. Anything too "raw" or real tends to make us uncomfortable, but the various writers of the Psalms don't make any attempt to hide their emotions. They vividly and honestly express the deepest feelings of their hearts, and we can, too.

The Psalms also provide important boundaries; they cause us to deal with God as he is—as he has revealed himself to us in his Word—not as we wish he was. The Psalms are prayers and songs, but they are God's own words. The Psalms help us learn more about God and how we can address and trust him in a vast array of circumstances.

Be sure to check out the "How to Pray" section for more helpful tips on how to pray the Psalms.

*Common Prayer Struggles***WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO PRAY?**

Sometimes we simply have no words. Maybe you are completely overwhelmed by your life circumstances and you don't even know where to begin. Perhaps you have a desire to pray, but don't know the "right words" to pray. In times like these, God can feel distant and prayer can feel an unfinished "task" hanging over your head. If that sounds like you, hear this encouragement: God understands and wants to be your strength.

**Make Prayer
a Priority**

Prayer is vitally important in the Christian life. It is communication with God our Father, empowered by the Spirit of God, prayed in the name of Jesus. Like anything else in life, however, prayer will not become a priority in our lives on its own. We order our calendars and schedules, giving preference to those things which we deem most important. If time with God in prayer is not given a place of priority in your life, it's safe to say prayer is not viewed as a priority.

Our schedules reveal what our hearts treasure most. John Bunyan wrote, "You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." In other words, you *always* have time to pray—but something else may be in its rightful place. Prayer is not merely a "checklist" item or a blocked-out time on the calendar, but taking a good look at your schedule and task lists can help you discern what items have been given a place of priority that they may not deserve.

Begin your day with Jesus—and watch what a difference it makes!

Good vs. Best

When we think of choosing something over prayer, it may be easy to think of "bad vs good." In other words, we often think of "bad" things pulling our attention away from "good things." However, most often, it's not bad vs good we have to worry about: it's good vs best. Children are a blessing from the Lord, but God never intended them to be placed above him. Our children—wonderful, good gifts—can become idols if we place them above God. Or maybe it's a job. Maybe God has placed you in an excellent company with a wonderful work environment doing what you love, and you devote your time and energy there above time spent with God. Vocation can be a good, God-glorifying thing, but it can also become an idol.

As you examine the way your time is spent, don't simply look for "bad" things; look for *good* things that have taken the place of the *best* thing: time with God.

Remember:
Prayer is Time
with God

If you have a strong relationship with your dad, you probably speak to him often. Conversely, if you have a bad or broken relationship with your dad, you probably don't speak to him often. This can become a cycle—for better or for worse. The more you avoid time with God in prayer, the less you will desire time with God in prayer. It will become easier to silence the gentle prodding of the Holy Spirit. However, when you devote time to prayer, you *commune* with God. You learn of him and his heart for you. The more you pray, the more you will desire that sweet time of communion with your heavenly Father.

*Common Prayer Struggles***WHY ISN'T GOD ANSWERING MY PRAYERS?**

There are fewer things more difficult or discouraging in the Christian life than feeling like your prayers aren't getting any higher than the ceiling. If we're honest, sometimes it feels like we're praying to a brick wall. Does God actually hear *all* our prayers?

Tell God How You Feel When it feels like God simply isn't hearing your prayers, it may sting a little to hear "you should pray about that." However, King David provides such wonderful prayers in the Psalms that speak to this specific pain and struggle. It's okay to tell God when it feels like you're hitting a wall. In Psalm 42:9-11, David cried out to God, asking, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about in sorrow?"

Prayer is a holy event, but it's a place for real, honest prayers. Tell God how you feel. He invites honest conversation, so don't be afraid to pray from the bottom of your heart.

Examine Yourself Sometimes the "wall" we feel is a wall built by our own hands. Unconfessed sin will not change your standing before God—he will never leave or forsake his children. We are forever secure in Jesus, who is our peace. But unconfessed sin can make us *feel* like we have been separated from God. In Psalm 32, David wrote that when he kept silent about his sin, his "bones wasted away." When he uncovered and confessed his sin, God forgave him. David then describes God as being a hiding place and deliverer—he no longer felt estranged from his Father. Confess your sin—God is faithful and just, and will forgive you (1 John 1:9).

Trust God's Timing The Bible says, "The LORD hears his people when they call to him for help" (Psalm 34:17 NLT). When we don't see God acting on our prayers, our hearts are inclined to distrust. We feel unseen and unheard. The enemy whispers lies of unbelief to our ears, and we begin to doubt God's promises to hear us when we pray. However, God cannot be rushed—he does all things in his perfect timing.

The children of Israel prayed for more than 400 years for deliverance from Egypt. It seemed that God had forgotten them and no longer heard their cries for help. Exodus 2:24 begins with these comforting words: "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered..." God knew. God heard. And God remembered.

God hears you, too. He hears your prayers and even the cries of your heart that go unspoken. Hope in God—trust in his promises that he will not keep his silence for long. He is always acting and moving, even when we can't see it.

*Common Prayer Struggles***WHAT IF I'M IN A DRY SEASON?**

Every Christian goes through seasons when it feels impossible to build a consistent habit of prayer. Maybe you had a good streak that fizzled out, or maybe you've simply never been able to maintain the consistency you desire. Take heart: you're not alone.

Walking through seasons of spiritual drought can be disheartening. Everything can seem like a burden and a chore rather than a joy and a delight, and the weight can feel unbearable. When David was feeling overwhelmed and even forgotten by God, he wrote, "Hope in God; for I shall again praise him." Why would he turn to the very one he felt had forgotten him? Because he knew where his help came from (Psalm 121).

In seasons of drought and dryness, we ought not forget our spring of living water (John 4). David learned to not forget in the dark what he had learned in the light. Even when his circumstances told him, "your God has forgotten you," David reminded himself: God is my hope and salvation. I will praise him.

**Drink from
the Well**

When we're walking through dry seasons and we can't seem to build a habit of prayer, go back to the basics. Spend intentional time in the Word, immersing yourself in God's goodness and mercy to you. Drink deeply of the living water—he will restore your soul (Psalm 23:3).

Practical tips and tricks cannot restore to you the joy of your salvation. They cannot quench spiritual thirst. They can be wonderful tools, but before you turn to habit-building tips, first turn to Jesus. Be refreshed and restored by his Word. Only then will you be able to build habits that are rooted in love for Christ and not out of obligation or duty.

HOW TO PRAY

“Let us then with confidence draw near
to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy
and find grace to help in time of need.”

Hebrews 4:16

*How to Pray***BEFORE YOU PRAY**

Prayer is a matter of the heart. Therefore, it can happen anywhere, any time. You can pray while standing in line at the BMV or while you're driving in your car. You can pray while you're jogging or as you drift off to sleep. However, when setting aside a specific time and place for prayer, there are a few practical things you can do to help "set the mood" and keep your mind and heart focused on God.

**Silence
Distraction**

How many times have you intended to pray only to find yourself scrolling Instagram a few minutes later? We are so easily distracted on our own, but any time we intend to commune with God, the enemy ramps up the distractions. Be intentional about silencing as many distractions as you can. Turn off the TV. Put your phone on airplane mode. Close the door. Small things like this can help greatly to silence the things that may easily distract you from intentional, focused prayer.

**Find a
Quiet Space**

If you have been following Jesus for a while, you may have heard the term "prayer closet." This term comes from Matthew 6 just before the Lord's Prayer. Jesus told his disciples, "when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret." This doesn't necessarily mean that you should have a secret, designated closet or room in your house that is only to be used for prayer. But it does help us understand an important truth: pray in a quiet, private place.

Make a List

One of the most helpful ways to pray intentional prayers is to create a list beforehand. Make a list of the people in your life with urgent, specific needs. Make a list of the friends and family who do not know Jesus. Make a list of your own needs and desires. Bring that list with you into your prayer time to help you stay on track, praying intentionally over each and every person or item on that list.

Set the Mood

This may seem silly, but we all know the things that help us focus. Maybe it's playing soft, instrumental music. Maybe it's lighting a candle or diffusing your favorite essential oil. Whatever it is for you, create a comfortable, distraction-free environment that is conducive to calm and focus your mind on prayer.

We understand that finding quiet places of solitude can be difficult during various seasons of life. Whether it's working long hours, raising small children, or whatever it may be, quiet places and times of solitude can seem like an impossible dream. If that sounds like you, be encouraged: your time of prayer doesn't have to be perfect. Seek space wherever you can find it. The Lord hears the cries of our hearts even when they're lifted to him while the kids are eating breakfast, as you drift to sleep after working a 12-hour shift, or while you're driving in the car. Jesus doesn't want perfection—he wants *you*.

*How to Pray***WHAT TO PRAY**

We've covered many different topics related to prayer, but now we come to the ultra-practical topic: *how* to pray. A quick Google search will return about 8 billion results, but we believe the best example comes from Jesus himself in the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is a wonderful prayer to pray verbatim or commit to memory, but it can also act as a guide to remind us what prayer is. A common way to think of this prayer structure is the acronym ACTS.

A = *Adoration*C = *Confession*T = *Thanksgiving*S = *Supplication**pray like this:*

*Our Father in Heaven
 hallowed be your name
 your Kingdom come. Your will be done
 on Earth as it is in Heaven.
 Give us this day 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.
 Amen*

- Adoration:** While the Lord’s Prayer does not include these elements in this order, it does contain each one. It begins with adoration: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” True prayer hallows God’s name and desires that others would also hallow his name. To hallow something is to honor it as holy. It is a recognition of who God is. In your own time of prayer, this might look like praising God for his kindness and mercy towards you or for giving you a new day. It might simply be telling God that you love him! Adoration to God can be expressed in many different ways, but one thing remains the same: God is the focus. We pray not to or through anyone else, but to God alone (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).
- Confession:** The Lord’s prayer includes space confession of sin: “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” As we praise God for who he is, we are reminded of who we are. Because we desire fellowship and communion with God, we confess our sins to him, knowing he hears and forgives (1 John 1:9). This also reminds us to extend that grace and forgiveness to others. Forgiven people forgive people.
- Thanksgiving:** Some manuscripts do not contain this doxology, so depending on your Bible translation, it may or may not be included. In those that do, Jesus finishes the prayer by saying, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.” By closing his prayer this way, Jesus was acknowledging that we pray for (or “because”) God is the king of heaven. Everything belongs to God, and it is in his power alone that prayer is heard and answered. When we pray, we should thank God for his power and provision in our lives.
- Supplication:** Supplication simply means “asking earnestly.” A careful reading of the Lord’s Prayer reveals seven different petitions of supplication. We pray God would hallow his name. We pray his kingdom would come. We pray his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. We pray he would give us our daily bread. We pray he would forgive us our debts. We pray to be spared temptation. We pray to be delivered from evil.

It is worth noting that of these seven petitions in the Lord’s Prayer, only one of them asks God to provide for physical needs. Three of the petitions ask for God to do things on earth as they are done in heaven. Three of the petitions ask God for help with past, present, and future sin. When we pray, we certainly ought to bring our needs and desires before God, but the Lord’s Prayer reminds us to pray humbly and selflessly. Our prayers shouldn’t be only extensive wish lists. Prayer is an act of worship, and should be God-centered and God-focused.

*How to Pray***PRAYING THE PSALMS**

There will be seasons in your life when there are no words to pray. It may be during times of deep, intense pain and suffering or it may be during times of drought, when you feel like God is far from you. In times like these, the Psalms are a wonderful help. If you have never prayed through a psalm, consider these suggestions.

**Try to
Understand
the Psalm
You're
Praying**

The Psalms are a collection of many songs and prayers. They were written at many different times and in many different contexts. Ask yourself, who is the writer of this psalm? What were they going through when they wrote this psalm? Many of the Psalms contain this information above each psalm, but you can also use a commentary like Blue Letter Bible to help provide some helpful information about the psalm.

**Meditate on
the Psalm**

Read the psalm (or section of the psalm) you intend to pray multiple times through. Read it slowly, chewing on each line and phrase. Does a particular verse resonate with your current life situation? Is there a particular word that sticks out to you or resonates with you? How would your life be different if you believed this psalm with all of your being? How can you apply the truth of this psalm to your life?

**Praise God
Using the
Language of
the Psalms**

Many of the Psalms include statements of worship to God for specific actions or attributes. Some of them may be new to you—maybe you've never praised God for the way he makes the "going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy" (Psalm 65:8). The Psalms teach us a wonderful vocabulary of praise to include in our prayer.

Pray!

When you're ready to pray, move slowly through the psalm. Pray it word-for-word or use the words as a guide for your situation. You may not have an army of enemies "encamping against you" (Psalm 27), but you may be facing many different struggles and attacks from the enemy. Pray through each verse you have chosen, and pray that God would give you faith to trust that he not only hears, but will answer you.

How to Pray

PRAYER JOURNALING

One of the best ways to keep track of your prayers—and remember the faithfulness of God in prayer—is to journal them. You can use a simple notebook or a helpful tool like the *One Thing I Ask* five-year prayer journal from Hosanna Revival. Be sure to include the date of your prayer so you can look back over the years of God’s faithfulness in answering your prayers (the *One Thing I Ask* prayer journal includes space for daily prayer requests for five years).

As you begin to record and track your prayers through journaling, you will build a record of what you’ve prayed for, when you prayed for it, and how God answered your prayers. Not only will this help build your trust in God, it will help you remember to thank him for prayers that you otherwise may have forgotten you prayed!

AFTER YOU PRAY

We have a tendency to expect God to answer our prayers *how* we want, *when* we want. But God doesn't work that way. God cannot be manipulated to fulfill our desires against his own will. God's timing is perfect, and he knows the best way to answer our prayers—even when we don't understand.

After You Pray

TRUST HIS TIMING

God’s timing is perfect. He knows the end from the beginning, and he knows exactly how—and when—to answer your prayers. Psalm 37:7 says, “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.” God is always moving and always working all things for our good and his glory. Trust in the Lord and wait patiently for him; stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord (Exodus 14:13).

After You Pray

WALK IN OBEDIENCE

St. Augustine once said, “Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.” Now, we have to be wise here. Augustine is not suggesting that we pray that God saves our unbelieving friends, then acting as though their salvation depends on us. Rather, we should not ask God to save our unbelieving friends and then never tell them about Jesus. If we truly believe God will answer our prayers, our actions will prove that faith. As the true but cheesy saying goes, “Hope is praying for rain; faith is carrying an umbrella.” Pray big, bold prayers, then live expectantly, walking in obedience to his will.

After You Pray

LISTEN FOR GOD

Prayer is communing with God. In part, that means we talk to God. But communion is two-way; God also speaks to us. After you pray, be attentive to the voice of God.

**Read his
Word.**

Quiet yourself and wait for him to speak. It may be he wants to share something more with you, or give you further insight into a situation. He may want to tell you that his grace is sufficient for you, reminding you that his strength is made perfect in your weakness. Don’t just talk to God—he desires to talk to you, too.

**Share prayer
requests with
wise, trusted
friends.**

God often speaks through other believers who know his Word. Trusted friends who love Jesus and walk with him daily can speak words of wisdom, encouragement, and even correction when needed.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

BOOKS

*Prayer: Experiencing Awe
and Intimacy with God*
by Tim Keller

Every Moment Holy: Volume I
by Douglas McKelvey

Every Moment Holy: Volume II
by Douglas McKelvey

*A Praying Life: Connecting
with God in a Distracting World*
by Paul E. Miller

Pray Like This
by Katie Noble

The Life of Prayer
by Edith Schaeffer

Praying the Bible
by Donald Whitney

PODCASTS

Pray the Word
with David Platt

APPS

Echo Prayer App