



28
BIBLICAL
REFLECTIONS

GROWING IN PRAYER

LEARNING TO PRAY WITH
DEPENDENCE AND DELIGHT

STEPHEN
SHEAD

In a sea of busyness and distractions, prayer so often falls off the agenda. Or maybe it was barely on the agenda to begin with. Even with the best of intentions, sometimes it's hard to know where to begin.

Wherever you're at, join Stephen Shead as he takes you through 4 weeks of daily reflections to get you on track with a pattern of prayerful living.

With each short reflection, you'll be encouraged to meditate on truths that fuel joyful prayer. Through the weeks, you will build up your own habit of coming before your heavenly Father each day to delight in and depend on him.

Also includes 4 Bible studies for individual or group use.

ISBN 978-1-925424-45-4



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GROWING IN PRAYER

**LEARNING TO PRAY WITH
DEPENDENCE AND DELIGHT**

STEPHEN SHEAD



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SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

Growing in Prayer

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Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

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ISBN 978 1 925424 45 4


Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design.

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This book is not simply a set of personal Bible devotions, nor is it a course to learn about prayer. It is a four-week program of daily reflections to help you grow in your prayer life, as you develop a deeper and more intimate relationship with God through the Lord Jesus.

In the first six reflections of each week, there will be some thoughts and Bible verses to help you reflect on God, your relationship with him, and prayer. The seventh reflection each week will be for reviewing what you learned that week and praying for your own church and its ministry. You'll see this symbol at points throughout:  That's a prompt for you to stop for a few minutes to reflect on what you've just read or to pray.

Before you jump in, I would really encourage you to make a serious commitment to do this

every day for the whole four weeks. I recommend beginning on a Monday, so that on Sundays you are praying for your church's ministry. Each day's exercise should only take 10 to 15 minutes. Don't panic if you miss a day; just do your best to catch up—and if you can't, it's not the end of the world! However, the program will be most effective in growing your prayer life if you set aside a small space each day (ideally in the morning) to read and reflect on that day's notes.

At the end of this book, there are four Bible studies that can be done alongside each week's reflections. You can do these studies yourself or in a group with others who are also going through the program.

If you are anything like me, you often feel weak, inadequate and unreliable in your prayer life. My goal is not to change how you feel about yourself, but to help you deepen your knowledge of God, your love of prayer and your security in the gospel, so that even when you are most burdened by your own weakness and unfaithfulness, you will not hesitate to “draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings” (Heb 10:22). If, by the end of this month, you bring your joys and struggles

to your loving heavenly Father more freely and naturally, the effort will have been well and truly worth it!

WEEK 1: THE HOW AND WHY OF PRAYER

—| DAY 1 |—

In our hectic lives, it is easy to get so caught up in the next thing we have to *do*. We forget that Jesus said: “...life is more than food, and the body more than clothes” (Luke 12:23).

Spend a moment thinking about the question: *What were you made for?*

Read the following verses as you reflect on this question:

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt 6:33)

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.” (Matt 22:37-38)

Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God, my joy and my delight.

I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God. (Ps 43:4)



Of course, often you might not *feel* like praising God. That's okay—our feelings are unreliable, and will only be perfectly renewed in heaven. But as we begin our journey in prayer, it is important to remember that *we were made to praise*. Or, as John Piper said in a sermon on Psalm 43, “we were made to enjoy God with overflowing praise”.¹

Tell God how you *feel* about praise, and that you *want* to become a person of praise. Then throughout the day, bring to mind Jesus' promise in Matthew 6:33 (above), and ask God to help you seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

Verses for further prayer: Psalm 100; Isaiah 61:10-11; Revelation 5:13

My ideas and questions

APPENDIX 2: BIBLE STUDIES

—| STUDY 1 |—

“OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN”

1. When it comes to prayer, what are your biggest struggles or difficulties? Write down your own main difficulties and share these in your group.
2. Read or listen to John 1:12-13. If you are a Christian, what is your relationship to God?
3. What do you need to do to have that relationship?

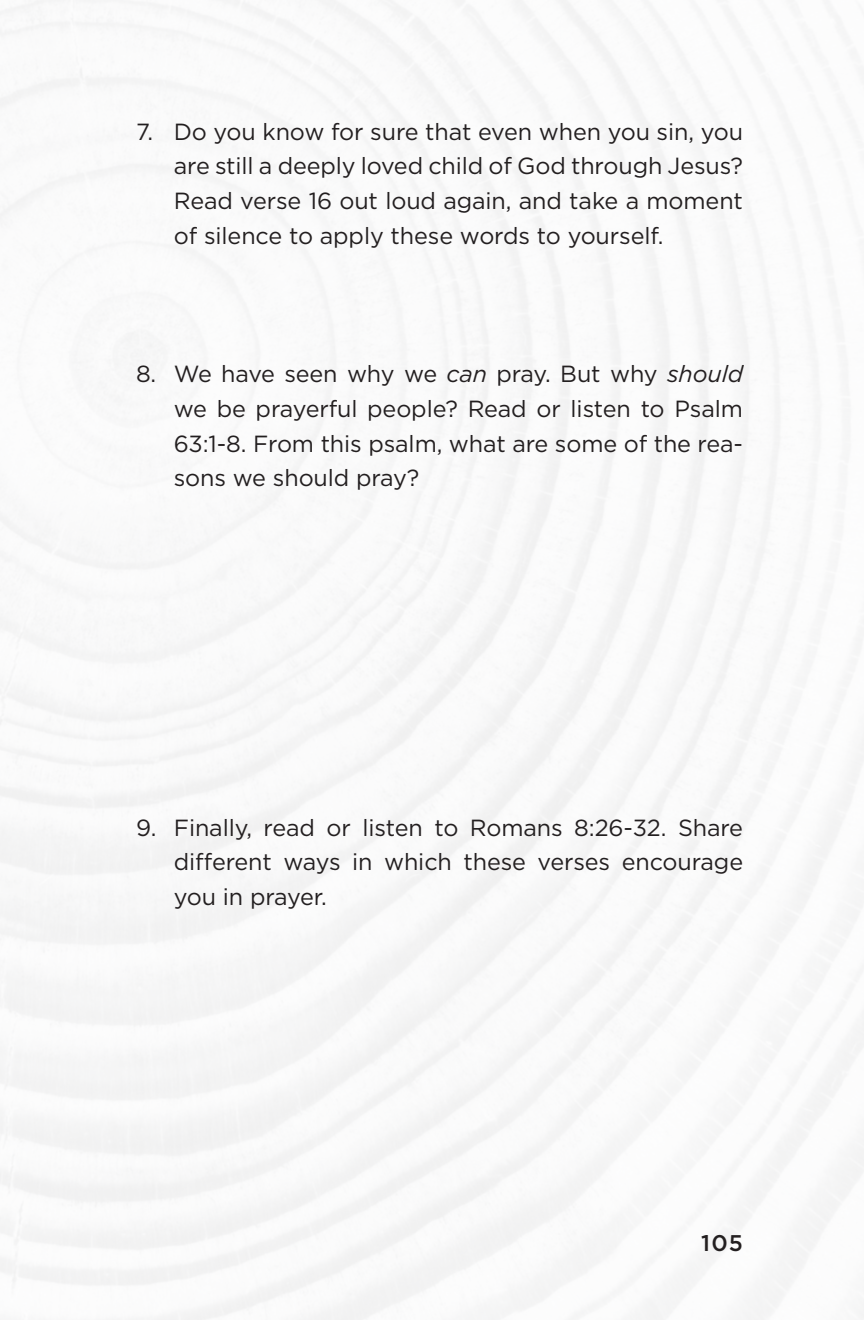
4. Do you ever feel that you can't pray because you are too sinful and unworthy of God? If so, how can the following verses help you?

- Hebrews 7:23-26

- 1 John 3:1

5. Read or listen to Romans 8:14-17. What gift has every Christian received?

6. What can we do because we have received the Spirit (v. 15)?

- 
7. Do you know for sure that even when you sin, you are still a deeply loved child of God through Jesus? Read verse 16 out loud again, and take a moment of silence to apply these words to yourself.

 8. We have seen why we *can* pray. But why *should* we be prayerful people? Read or listen to Psalm 63:1-8. From this psalm, what are some of the reasons we should pray?

 9. Finally, read or listen to Romans 8:26-32. Share different ways in which these verses encourage you in prayer.

In the weeks to come, we will focus on *what* things to talk to God about. But for now, reflect on the amazing privilege of being God's child through Jesus, and on how that encourages you to pray.

Finish with a time of prayer. Here are some things you may like to talk to God about:

- » Thank him that we can come to him as our Father.
- » Thank him for the sacrifice of Jesus for us, and for the gift of his Spirit.
- » Tell him about one of your struggles with prayer, and ask him to help you.

Note on praying in a group

Some Christians find it difficult to pray aloud in a group. Your group may like to start with a few minutes of silent prayer, so that each person can talk to God privately.

It is good if everyone can get up the courage to pray out loud. However, it helps if we all keep our prayers short, simple and honest. The worst thing to do when praying out loud is try to sound impressive or worry about what other people think! You can just tell your heavenly Father one thing that is on your heart, in a few words.