

PRAYER WEEK

21st-27th JUNE

2020

PRAYER WEEK

Introduction

In the past few months, we have been reminded more than ever that humanity has far less control of our lives and future than we often believe. Living through a global pandemic has drawn many of us to prayer as our last resort to dealing with the chaos, stress and anxiety all around us, and in our own hearts and lives.

And yet, prayer should never be a last resort for the people of God. It is our first step before attempting anything. We prayerfully seek God's wisdom and guidance in order to be shaped by his desires and align our plans with his.

This is now our second Prayer Week in the life of our church, though no doubt a very different experience to our first. But although the context in which we find ourselves in this week is vastly different, our goal is precisely the same.

Prayer Week is an opportunity for us to renew our focus and dependence on God above all things. It is a time to lift our eyes, hearts and minds to God, his work and mission in the world, and where we find a place in this as his people.

My hope is that, once again, this week will challenge and grow each one of us in our faith in God. That we will grow our hearts for all that God loves and desires, and that we will treasure what is truly valuable as we increase the depth and breadth of our prayer lives.

We seek to grow people who Depend on Jesus. And we continue to pursue that more than ever as a church.

I hope that this booklet will contribute to guiding you through Prayer Week in how we pray, what we pray for, and why this is such a special and vital practice for God's people.



Luke Thomson
Senior Minister

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DAILY DEVOTION #1

Each day we will read through a Psalm, reflecting on how it might shape our own prayer life.

Bible

Read Psalm 5

Think

1. What does the Psalmist know to be true of God?
2. What does this lead to asking God to do?
3. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

"Whenever God determines to do a great work, he first sets his people to pray."

Charles Spurgeon

Pray

1. Praise God for being compassionate and merciful.
2. Thank God for his work of grace and mercy in your life.
3. For brothers and sisters in Christ across our whole church family.
4. For Christians who are persecuted and mistreated for their faith around the world.

In each devotion, we've included a written prayer to help us learn to pray from other Christians across history. You may like to pray these prayers directly, or use them as inspiration for your own prayer each day.

LEARNING TO PRAY

A prayer for our world

Dear Heavenly Father,

You are the God of all compassion and comfort. We thank you that you listen to our prayers. We pray today for our world, our nation, our city and our church as the Coronavirus spreads.

Please bring help to all our communities according to their needs. Heal those afflicted and strengthen all who have the responsibility for care. In your mercy, please provide a cure and give wisdom to those seeking to develop a vaccine for this condition.

We pray, too, for ourselves. Enable us to walk by faith. Help us to be careful and wise in taking whatever precautions are necessary to limit and contain the spread of this virus. Strengthen us to remain calm while vigilant; responsible citizens seeking the welfare of others above ourselves.

At times of uncertainty and anxiety, help our world to look to security in your Son, Jesus Christ. And give courage to Christians as we point others to the One in whom there is always hope.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A prayer of Glenn Davies (<https://sydneyanglicans.net/covid19prayers>)

DAILY DEVOTION #2

Bible

Read Psalm 13

Think

1. What does the Psalmist ask of God?
2. What gives the Psalmist confidence to trust God?
3. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

"It is remarkable that in all of his writings Paul's prayers for his friends contain no appeals for changes in their circumstances."

Timothy Keller

Pray

1. Praise God for being strong, powerful and in control of all creation.
2. Thank God for the ability to know him personally, and for the way he speaks to us through the Bible.
3. For those who are in physical, spiritual, mental or emotional need.
4. For those who lead our church (including staff, ministry leaders, Community Group leaders, etc.)

LEARNING TO PRAY

A prayer for church and nation

Show mercy to the whole world, O Father of all;
let the gospel of Your Son run
and be glorified throughout all the earth.
Let it be made known to all unbelievers
and obeyed by all Christians.

Be merciful to Your church and to this nation;
give Your pastors a discerning spirit,
enable all who are ordained to any holy function
to diligently feed their flocks –
instructing them in saving knowledge,
guiding them by their examples,
praying for and blessing them,
exercising spiritual discipline in Your church
and duly administering your holy sacraments.

Multiply Your blessings on our government leaders,
that they may all,
according to the talents they have received,
be faithful instruments of your glory.

Give to our schools and universities,
zeal, prudence, and holiness.
Visit in mercy all the children of affliction;
relieve their necessities,
lighten their burdens,
give them a cheerful submission to Your gracious will,
and at length bring them and us,
with those that already rest from their labors,
into the joy of our Lord,
to whom with You, O Father, and You, O Holy Spirit,
be all praise, now and forever.

A prayer of John Wesley, adapted. (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/be-merciful-to-your-church-and-to-this-nation/>)

DAILY DEVOTION #3

Bible

Read Psalm 56

Think

1. What does the Psalmist expect God will do?
2. How does the Psalmist intend on expressing their trust in God?
3. How could this shape your own prayer life?

*"Prayer will make a man cease from sin,
or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer."
John Bunyan*

Pray

1. Praise God for his goodness and kindness.
2. Thank God for those who personally support and encourage you in following Jesus.
3. For Christians to have the opportunity to display their faith publicly and bear witness to Jesus to the wider world.
4. For those who seek to bring the good news of Jesus to remote areas around Australia.

LEARNING TO PRAY

A prayer to the Holy Spirit

Breathe in me O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.

Strengthen me O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.

A prayer of Saint Augustine.

DAILY DEVOTION #4

Bible

Read Psalm 115

Think

1. Why does the Psalmist want to ensure glory goes to God?
2. What feeds the desire in our own hearts to receive glory for ourselves?
3. How does this Psalm help us reorient our desires?
4. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

"Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. And prayer is the turning away from ourselves to God in the confidence that He will provide the help we need. Prayer humbles us as needy and exalts God as wealthy."

John Piper

Pray

1. Praise God for his wisdom in all things.
2. Thank God for the hope we have of God fulfilling his promises for the future.
3. For our church family to grow in our hearts desire to bear witness to the grace of God in Blacktown.
4. For those who seek to bring the good news of Jesus to difficult and dangerous places across the world.

LEARNING TO PRAY

A prayer before a meal

All look unto you, O Lord; and you give them their meat in due season; that you give them they gather: you open your hand, and they are filled with all things in abundance ([Ps. 104:27.](#))

O Lord, in whom is the source and inexhaustible fountain of all good things, pour out your blessing upon us, and sanctify to our use the meat and drink which are the gifts of your kindness toward us, that we, using them soberly and frugally as you enjoin, may eat with a pure conscience.

Grant, also, that we may always both with true heartfelt gratitude *acknowledge*, and with our lips *proclaim*, you our Father and the giver of all good, and, while enjoying bodily nourishment, aspire with special longing of heart after the bread of your doctrine, by which our souls may be nourished in the hope of eternal life, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

A prayer of John Calvin.

DAILY DEVOTION #5

Bible

Read Psalm 136

Think

1. What is this Psalm expressing?
2. What effect does the repeating line through this Psalm have?
3. How could we increase the praise of God within our own prayers?
4. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

"I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer."
Martin Luther

Pray

1. Praise God for the beauty of creation.
2. Thank God for the depth and richness of his love.
3. For the city of Blacktown and its people, that they might come to know Jesus as Saviour and King.
4. For those suffering the effects and implications of war and fighting around the world.

LEARNING TO PRAY

A prayer for understanding God's Word

Blessed Lord,
you have given us your Holy Scriptures for our learning.
May we so hear them,
read, learn, and take them to heart,
that being strengthened and comforted by your holy Word,
we may cling to the blessed hope of everlasting life,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

A prayer of Thomas Cranmer.

DAILY DEVOTION #6

Bible

Read Psalm 146

Think

1. What reason does the Psalmist have to put their hope in God?
2. What can lead us to doubt God's trustworthiness?
3. What makes prayer possible? What makes it necessary?

*"We do not drift into spiritual life or disciplined prayer.
We will not grow in prayer unless we plan to pray."
D A Carson*

Pray

1. Praise God for sending his Son into the world to bring us back to himself.
2. Thank God for the gift of prayer, and the confidence we have that he hears us and cares for us.
3. For leaders, governments and all in authority in Australia and across the world.
4. For those whom you know personally who don't yet know Jesus as their Saviour and King.

LEARNING TO PRAY

A prayer of confession

O my dearest Lord Jesus Christ,
you know my poor soul and my great transgressions,
and I cry out to you alone with an open heart.
I am sorry that I do not have will or intentions as I should and I fall behind daily,
for I am a poor, sick sinner.
You know that I want to have good will and good intentions,
but my foe strikes and leads me captive.
Redeem me,
a poor sinner,
according to your divine will.
Deliver me from all evil and all afflictions.
Strengthen and increase in me true Christian faith.
Give me grace to faithfully love my neighbor as myself with all my heart,
and to love him as a brother.
Give me patience and perseverance in all persecution and trouble.
You told St. Peter not to forgive only seven times,
and you have called us to come to you for consolation.
So I come with the assurance of what you have pledged,
and I cry to you as my true Pastor and Bishop of my soul in all my needs.
You alone know how and when I need your help.
Your will be done, and your name be praised forever.
Amen.

A prayer of Martin Luther

BIBLE STUDY

Praying for one another

Have you ever been encouraged by hearing the prayers of others?

What might people find challenging about praying aloud in a group?

Read Colossians 1:3-14

In all of Paul's letters in the New testament, he begins by expressing the content of his prayers for those Christians, and how he intends to continue praying for them.

1. Why does Paul gives thanks to God for the Colossian Christians? (vv. 3-4)
2. Paul particularly notes the love that they have for one another (vv. 4, 8). Why do you think he highlights this as the key expression of their faith?
3. Make a list of all the things Paul is praying for the Colossian Christians (vv. 9-12). Does anything stand out about this list?

4. In what ways might Paul's prayers differ from how we typically hear Christians pray for one another (or how we might pray for one another in Community Group)?

5. What encouragement do you think the Colossian church felt by hearing Paul articulate exactly *what* he was praying for them?

6. In your experience, how common is it for Christians to express *what* they are praying for you (as opposed to simply letting you know they are praying)? How might it be an encouragement to hear *what* others are praying for you?

7. How might this prayer of Paul's help us reshape *what* we pray for others?

Pray

1. Thank God for the gift of praying for others.
2. Pray that our prayers would be shaped by godly desire and concern.
3. You might like to rewrite Paul's prayer in your own words, and use it to pray for the other members of your group.

A SIMPLE WAY TO PRAY EVERY DAY

Of all the things Martin Luther is known for, among the foremost is his dedication to prayer. He is famous for commenting, “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” He wasn’t exaggerating, either. Many of his friends and students could attest that he would spend several hours on his knees in fervent, daily prayer — often at seemingly inopportune times in the middle of the day.

At one point, Luther’s barber and longtime friend, Peter Beskendorf, asked if he would teach him how to pray. Luther responded by writing Beskendorf a letter which he called, “A Simple Way to Pray.” Luther’s letter is a gourmet buffet for all Christians who hunger for more rich and satisfying prayerfulness.

While I would encourage anyone to enjoy the full buffet, for now I will simply provide the first course: a simple way to pray by using the Lord’s Prayer.

Prone to Wander in Every Age

But why should we go to Luther for help praying in the twenty-first century in the first place? Most of our modern problems with prayer are born of distraction: email alerts, Facebook notifications, constantly revolving media. How can Luther help us with these sorts of problems?

In fact, Luther directly approaches this very obstacle in his letter. Hear how his words resonate with your own difficulties with prayer:

Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, “Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.” Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day. . . . We must be careful not to break the habit of true prayer and imagine other works to be necessary which, after all, are nothing of the kind.

It is strangely encouraging to be reminded that our temptation toward distraction from prayer for the sake of seemingly “more productive” tasks is not unique to the digital age. The problem of our prayerlessness is not simply with our smartphones or schedules. The problem is with our hearts. So, if we really want to grow in our prayer life, we must take aim at something much deeper than surface distractions: our most inward affections and desires.

And this is where the Lord’s Prayer is most helpful.

How to Pray as Jesus Taught Us

First, Luther recommends simply to pray through the prayer once, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 6:9–13). He then says to go back through the prayer and pray each petition individually:

- 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 evil.
- For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
- Amen.

Luther exhorts us to let each petition guide our prayer. So, after praying, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,” we may continue to pray, “Yes, Father, it is our great desire that your name would be feared and revered for who you are: our God, our Creator, the Holy One who, in unthinkable mercy, gave your only begotten Son to save us from your wrath upon our sin.”

We can then move to the next petition, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” and pray, “We know that Jesus is reigning right now with authority over all things, and yet we still experience much brokenness here on earth. Father, bring your kingdom in greater measure today, beginning in my own heart and pouring out to my home, community, city, nation, and to the ends of the earth.”

Eventually, we move through each petition until we’ve reached the “Amen.” We might be inclined to think of the Amen as the simplest, least significant part of the Lord’s Prayer. However, Luther does not dismiss it so quickly. Instead, he exhorts us to make a bold, powerful, and confident “Amen.”

You must always speak the Amen firmly. Never doubt that God in his mercy will surely hear you and say “yes” to your prayers. . . . Do not leave your prayer without thinking, “Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know as a certainty and a truth.” That is what Amen means.

Three Benefits of Praying the Lord’s Prayer

There are probably dozens of benefits to praying to God as God himself taught us. Here, I will just offer three. Praying the Lord’s Prayer enables us to:

1. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

Personally, I tend toward praying inward-focused prayers that center on *my* confession, *my* problems, and *my* requests. Praying the Lord's Prayer as Luther recommends helps us to seek a greater awareness of Christ, other people, and God's broader mission in our prayers.

2. Discipline our wandering minds.

Our minds drift so easily in times of prayer. One moment I'm praying, the next I'm thinking about that email I need to reply to. Utilizing the structure of the Lord's Prayer helps me to recognize when my mind has wandered and helps me remember where to pick up again.

3. Build a fence so our prayers can run wild inside.

As I mentioned earlier, our lack of prayerfulness is chiefly a heart issue. Some people may push back on this method of prayer, saying that it is too structured and therefore restrains the Spirit's spontaneous leading. In fact, I have found the opposite to be true.

As someone who has always favored unscripted prayers that express heartfelt longings and desires, I have not found structure and spontaneity to be at all at odds with one another. I am amazed to find that, every time I pray through the Lord's Prayer as Luther has commended, my prayers have been richer, deeper, and more revealing, and have unlocked affections that are otherwise seldom seen.

Learning to Desire God as God Desires

Why would Jesus command us to "pray like this" (Matthew 6:9)? Jesus did not simply provide some words for disciples who had nothing else to say to God. Rather, the Lord's Prayer is meant to have a total, shaping effect on our hearts, helping us to see and yearn for the very things that God himself desires — most centrally, to see and experience more of God himself in our hearts and lives.

Obviously, there's no silver bullet for achieving the perfect prayer life, but I have found Luther's method to be an effective weapon in fighting for a richer prayer life.

Personally, I've experienced a renewed sense of expectancy in prayer, with more excitement and intentionality, and a deeper love for Jesus and appreciation for the cross-won gift of prayer. Inasmuch as it has benefited me, I commend it to you.

With that, I will end where Luther begins: "I will tell you as best I can what I do personally when I pray. May our dear Lord grant to you and to everybody to do it better than I! Amen."

This article can be found online at:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-simple-way-to-pray-every-day>

THERE ARE NO UNANSWERED PRAYERS

A couple of months ago, as my husband and I spent a typical evening watching our twin toddlers play after dinner, I turned to him and said, “Can you believe we have twins?” Like many parents of multiples, I’m regularly amazed we got two kids at one time—and are able to watch them learn and grow through the same stages in different ways. But my wonder as I watched them play that night was loaded with history, our history of becoming parents.

Our journey to parenthood was a difficult one, so when we finally got a positive pregnancy test (that by all appearances wasn’t going to end in miscarriage) we were simply hopeful to see a heartbeat at our first ultrasound. Instead we saw two. And our lives have never been the same.

In the painful years of waiting for God to answer our prayers for a child this side of heaven, we never dreamed he would have given us two at once. When we stare at the faces of our twin boys, in all their boundless energy of toddlerhood, and now as we stare too at the face of our newborn son, we are regularly brought to worship the God who not only answered our prayer, but answered more abundantly than we could have imagined.

When God Is Silent

Sometimes God answers our prayers immediately. We pray for a job offer in the morning and get a phone call by dinner. We pray for clarity in a difficult circumstance and find resolution by week’s end. But sometimes he answers prayers more slowly. Sometimes he’s working behind the scenes of our trials, yet we can’t see his handiwork—leading us to feel like our prayer has fallen on deaf ears. When we are in the position of waiting for God to act—to remedy a situation, to heal an illness, to bring a wayward child home—and we don’t see any light at the end of the tunnel, it can overwhelm us and cause unbelief to surface. Like most people, many prayers leave me wondering if I’ll ever hear an answer in this life.

We aren’t the first to experience such silence.

Abraham waited years and years for God to provide the promised son (Gen. 21:1–7). Joseph suffered silently and alone in Egypt until adulthood, waiting for God to reunite him with his family. On more than one occasion the Israelites faced captivity for hundreds of years as they waited on God to deliver them. They waited for the promised land in the wilderness. And they waited on the Messiah to be born.

In each of these circumstances, the waiting lasted far longer than anticipated. And at many points Israel trusted in what was seen, not in what was unseen.

When God is silent, we're often tempted to doubt his goodness. We're tempted to doubt his promises can really be true. We doubt he will answer our prayers.

Beyond Imagination

But then there are moments when light breaks through and we see glimmers of hope that God is answering prayers we've uttered more times than we can count. We see a friendship gone cold begin to thaw after years of misunderstanding and fighting. We meet a man who seems he could be God's provision of a husband after thinking the ship of marriage has long since sailed. We get a new job after months of unemployment and closed doors. Or we get twins after praying for an open womb.

Scripture brims with stories of God answering prayers that lead his people to marvel at the magnitude of his might and care. He gives children to barren, elderly people (Luke 1:5–25). He divides bodies of water so his people can escape from their enemies (Exod. 14). He defeats a giant with a few stones in the hand of a shepherd boy (1 Sam. 17). He tumbles walls in obscure ways, like marching around in circles (Josh. 6). He provides a redeemer for two widows (Ruth 4:13–17). He creates food out of nothing (Matt. 14:12–14). He raises the dead (1 Kings 17:17–24; John 11:38–44). God is in the business of answering prayers that seem impossible, and he often does so on a timetable different than our own.

However, the answers to prayer in our own lives pale in comparison to the greatest answer that arrived following four centuries of silence and hope (Luke 2). But did they know it would be God himself? Could they have imagined this Messiah would be not only a great man, but the God-man? Could they have dreamed that when they held that boy in all his newborn sweetness, they were holding God? Or that when they ate and walked and talked with him, they were in the presence of the Almighty?

Isn't that how our God works, though? The architect of all creation can dream up things we never would imagine.

No Unanswered Prayers

This is our hope when our prayers go "unanswered." The reality is there are no unanswered prayers. A "no" now doesn't mean a "no" forever. As John Piper helpfully reminds us, God is often masterminding a thousand details behind the

tapestry of our lives, and we only get to see three of them. Sometimes we see them immediately. Sometimes we don't for years. Sometimes we don't see them until we're with him in eternity. And yet the truth remains: he is still in the business of answering our prayers.

My sons remind me of this reality. When I can't see God working, he is there. When I think my prayers are going unanswered, he is not silent. When I wonder if he has forgotten me in the pain of my circumstances, he is present.

I don't know the end of my story, but he does. As the great architect of my story, he is crafting one I'd never dream to write for myself. And it will be better than I can now imagine. All I need to do is look at my twins and remember.

This article can be found online at:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/there-are-no-unanswered-prayers/>

