

# PRAYER WEEK

15th-21st August

2021



# PRAYER WEEK

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## Introduction

Prayer is such a fundamental aspect of the Christian life. It is an outworking of relationship with God. It is a way of expressing that we Depend on Jesus.

Yet, despite being so crucial, few Christians would disagree that prayer is also surprisingly difficult. There are certainly some gifted prayers among us, for whom prayer is regular, habitual, joyful and sustained at length. For most of us, though, that is not so much the case. We may have good days, good seasons even. But most of us probably wish we prayed more than we did.

Prayer Week is an opportunity for us to pause and reflect on our personal prayer life. A chance to reset our habits, to engage in new practices, or recover old ones. Each year we set aside a week for us to focus on exactly this as a church family.

In the past 18 months, I suspect some of us have been drawn to pray a lot more in light of the circumstances around us. Others of us may have withdrawn, and found difficulty in processing the events around the world—or in our own lives—and have found prayer all the more difficult.

My prayer for you this week is that, regardless of your experience so far this year, you might enjoy a chance to reset and refresh your prayer life. To draw near to God and all that he invites us to enjoy.

Luke Thomson

*Senior Minister*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L Thomson". The letters are cursive and fluid, with the first name "L" being a simple vertical line and "Thomson" written in a connected script.



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# DAILY DEVOTION #1

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*Each day we will read through some of the prayers of Jesus, reflecting on how it might shape our own prayer life.*

## **Bible**

Read Psalm John 17:1-5

## **Think**

1. What is most striking about this prayer?
2. What is the aim of Jesus' prayer?
3. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

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"If I feel myself disinclined to pray,  
then is the time when I need to pray more than ever."  
Charles Spurgeon

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## **Pray**

1. Confess your sin and acknowledge your need for forgiveness.
2. Thank God for his mercy and forgiveness 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

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## A prayer for Monday

Dear Lord Jesus

Another Monday has come and my heart, mind and will is filled with joy, excitement, anxiety and worry. I am exhausted. I come to stop and pause and reflect on the truth of who you are.

Jesus you are the head of the Church, including the local church you have placed me in to serve and lead in. You are the one who truly know's what is best for the Church and in light of that I surrender to you my personal will and agenda again.

Jesus I thank-you that my salvation is not based on my work at the church, but simply based on your work. I desperately need to be reminded now that 'it is finished' you have paid the prize, oh what reliving and joyous news it is to my soul. In light of that I surrender to you this ministry again.

Jesus I thank you my identity is not based on my title, my skill set, who likes me, how good the worship was, how many people came, how good my sermon was but simply in you. You define my identity, thank-goodness for that. Once again I repent of what I have found security in and rest in who I am in you. Oh sweet joy it is to rest in that. Thank-you for your grace.

Jesus I come before your throne and I bow in my heart and I pray for not just my church but all the Christ exalting ones in our city, that you will be pleased with our witness of your name in this city. I pray for my brothers and sisters serving you as pastors and leaders I pray refresh their souls in you, help them to rest their identity in you and grant them the grace and power to run the race not in their own strength but in yours and through your power and strength sustain them till their final breath.

Jesus I pray that you will empower me each day and each moment to live a life that brings you glory, not just on Sunday and I live life that brings you joy and that you Jesus alone are remembered and glorified in all that I do.

In your might and glorious name. Amen

*A prayer of Shebu John.*

<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-prayer-for-monday/>

# DAILY DEVOTION #2

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## **Bible**

Read John 17:6-19

## **Think**

1. What kinds of things does Jesus want for his disciples?
2. What does Jesus value most for his disciples?
3. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

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"God will either give us what we ask  
or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything he knows."  
Tim Keller

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## **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

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A prayer for spiritual maturity

Look upon us, O Lord,  
and let all the darkness of our souls  
vanish before the beams of thy brightness.  
Fill us with holy love,  
and open to us the treasures of thy wisdom.  
All our desire is known unto thee,  
therefore perfect what thou hast begun,  
and what thy Spirit has awakened us to ask in prayer.  
We seek thy face,  
turn thy face unto us and show us thy glory.  
Then shall our longing be satisfied,  
and our peace shall be perfect.

*A prayer of Saint Augustine (354-430AD).*

# DAILY DEVOTION #3

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## **Bible**

Read John 17:20-26

## **Think**

1. How does it feel to know Jesus has prayed this for you?
2. What does Jesus consider most important in praying for you?
3. How could this shape your own prayer life?

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“The key to praying with power is to become the kind of persons who do not use God for our ends but are utterly devoted to being used for His ends.”

John Piper

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## **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

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A prayer for personal growth

Gracious and holy Father,  
give me wisdom to perceive you,  
intelligence to fathom you,  
patience to wait for you,  
eyes to behold you,  
a heart to meditate upon you,  
and a life to proclaim you,  
through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

*A prayer of Benedict (480-547AD).*

*<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/give-me-a-life-to-proclaim-you/>*

# DAILY DEVOTION #4

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## **Bible**

Read Matthew 11:25-26

## **Think**

1. How are the truths of God revealed to little children?
2. Where are we tempted to be confident and wise in our own eyes?
3. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

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*"If we are to pray aright, perhaps it is quite necessary that we pray contrary to our own heart. Not what we want to pray is important, but what God wants us to pray. The richness of the Word of God ought to determine our prayer, not the poverty of our heart."*

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

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## **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

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## A prayer before bed

O Lord God—who has given man the night for rest, as you have created the day in which he may employ himself in labor—grant, I pray, that my body may so rest during this night that my mind cease not to be awake to you, nor my heart faint or be overcome with torpor, preventing it from adhering steadfastly to the love of you.

While laying aside my cares to relax and relieve my mind, may I not, in the meanwhile, forget you, nor may the remembrance of your goodness and grace, which ought always to be deeply engraven on my mind, escape my memory.

In like manner, also, as the body rests may my conscience enjoy rest.

Grant, moreover, that in taking sleep I may not give indulgence to the flesh, but only allow myself as much as the weakness of this natural state requires, to my being enabled thereafter to be more alert in your service.

Be pleased to keep me so chaste and unpolluted, not less in mind than in body, and safe from all dangers, that my sleep itself may turn to the glory of your name.

But since this day has not passed away without my having in many ways offended you through my proneness to evil, in like manner as all things are now covered by the darkness of the night, so let everything that is sinful in me lie buried in your mercy.

Hear me, O God, Father and Preserver, through Jesus Christ your Son.

Amen.

*A prayer of John Calvin (1509-1564AD).*

# DAILY DEVOTION #5

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## **Bible**

Read Luke 22:39-46

## **Think**

1. What is Jesus' temptation?
2. How does Jesus' prayer acknowledge both his own will and God's will?
3. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

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*"I believe that prayer is the measure of the man, spiritually, in a way that nothing else is."*  
*J. I. Packer*

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## **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

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A prayer for people

May God the Father,  
and the eternal High Priest Jesus Christ,  
build us up in faith and truth and love,  
and grant us our portion among the saints  
with all those who believe on our Lord Jesus Christ.  
We pray for all saints,  
for kings and rulers,  
for the enemies of the cross of Christ,  
and for ourselves we pray that our fruit may abound  
and we may be made perfect in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

*A prayer of Polycarp (69-155AD)*

# DAILY DEVOTION #6

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## **Bible**

Read Luke 23:32-34

## **Think**

1. How difficult do you think this prayer was for Jesus to pray?
2. How important is it to forgive those ignorant of their sin?
3. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

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"Effective prayer is the fruit of a relationship with God,  
not a technique for acquiring blessings."

Don Carson

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## **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

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## A prayer for a non-believing friend

Dear Father.

I know you to be a lover of the prodigal and a welcomer to the lost. I know that your desire is that all people be saved that none perish.

You showed me kindness when I was blind to your goodness. You opened my eyes so that I could see your glorious righteousness. You convicted me of my sin, then comforted my heart with the grace of the gospel.

Today I ask you to do the same work in the life of \_\_\_\_\_. Open their ears that they may hear your word, open their eyes that they may see your glory, warm their heart with the forgiveness of sins and cause them to trust in Jesus, so that they will know with me the joy of serving you and the hope of life eternal.

Amen

*A prayer of Simone Richardson*

*<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/prayer-for-a-non-believing-friend/>*

# BIBLE STUDY

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## Praying to a God who speaks

Can you remember the first time you prayed? Can you describe where, how or why it happened?

### **Read Hebrews 1:1-3**

1. What does this teach us about God?
2. What does it teach us about God's relationship with us?

*Prayer is a reply to a conversation that God has started.  
We must therefore understand how he first speaks to us.*

3. What do you think of this idea above? How does Hebrews help us consider how God has spoken first? How might this help us consider our prayer life from a different perspective?

### **Read Hebrews 4:4-16**

4. What is a priest's job? What difference does it make that Jesus is a high priest that 'sympathises with our weaknesses'?
5. What things are we encouraged to **do** in this passage?

## **Living it out**

6. Have you ever been in a place that has made you spontaneously want to pray? Share with the group.

7. What kinds of places, in our day-to-day lives, are places where we can meaningfully talk to God?

8. How might the places we pray help or hinder our prayers lives?

9. In pairs, pick one or two sets of alternatives below and discuss the pros and cons of each.

- The same place / a different place
- Sitting still / moving around
- A noisy place / a quiet place
- Alone / with other people
- A comfortable place / an uncomfortable place
- At home / away from home

Share your thoughts with the group.

## **Pray**

1. Thank God for the gift of prayer.
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.

# HOW TO PRAY WHEN LIFE FALLS APART

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In the midst of broken dreams and riveting pain, how should we pray?

Should we pray for healing and deliverance, believing that we just need to ask, because God can do anything? Or should we relinquish our desires to God, trusting that even in our anguish he has the perfect plan for us?

Yes.

When life falls apart, God invites us to do both.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faced unimaginable suffering. Sweating drops of blood, he fell to the ground and prayed: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).

Jesus, in his agony, is teaching us by example how to pray when we’re desperate.

## **Abba, Father**

Jesus doesn’t begin with, “Almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth.” Of course, God is Lord of all and deserves honor and reverence. But Jesus chooses a term of endearment: “Abba.” Abba is an intimate, personal term for a father. Jesus is asking his Father to do something for him.

In a similar way, I need to draw near to God in my pain. He’s the Almighty Lord, but he’s also my Abba Father (Rom. 8:15). I need to approach him as such.

## **Nothing Too Difficult**

Jesus knows God can do anything. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. All things are his servants. Nothing is impossible with him.

While I know those Scripture verses by heart too, I often functionally doubt God’s ability to change my situation. I scan my circumstances and assume things will continue as they are. Even as I’m praying, I don’t look for miraculous answers; my prayers become rote recitations of requests more than earnest petitions of faith.

But in Gethsemane, Jesus knows his Father can grant his request. God gives life to the dead and summons into being things that don’t exist.

And I need to remember his limitless power when my situation looks insurmountable.

## **Remove This Cup**

The cup Jesus asks God to remove isn't mere physical suffering. Disciples and martyrs through the ages have faced physical pain without fear. Jesus is anguished over suffering that's infinitely deeper. He is facing the terrifying fury of God's wrath over our sin. And he's facing that wrath alone, with no comfort from above.

Jesus knows God can change this horrifying situation. So he asks. He wants God to remove the very suffering he was sent to bear, the suffering he willingly came for, the suffering that would secure salvation for his people. Jesus wasn't coerced onto the cross. He lay down his life of his own accord (John 10:18).

But now Jesus is asking if there is another way—any other way—for God to accomplish his purposes.

So many times I filter my requests. Should I ask God to relieve my suffering when I know he can use it? Is it okay to ask for healing, or is that presumptuous? Should I not ask for anything and just accept what I've been given? That posture seems more holy.

Yet, Jesus asks God to remove the cup.

If Jesus can ask, I can too. It's appropriate to ask God to remove my suffering, change my situation, keep me from further pain. He longs to give me good gifts. I've begged God to heal friends, save family members, and give clarity, and he has answered "yes." But I've also pleaded with God to save my dying son, heal my escalating disease, and bring back my husband, and he said "no." So even though I don't know how he will answer, my Father still bids me to earnestly petition him for the things I desire.

### **Not My Will, But Yours**

Jesus finally relinquishes his will to God's. When denied his desire, Jesus accepts the decision completely. He stumbles to his execution without murmur or complaint.

This relinquishment isn't easy for me. When I keep God at a distance, I can stay detached without expectations. But if I draw near to him and truly believe he can change the situation, I can start to clutch the outcome I want. I may verbalize "Your will be done," but I'm whiteknuckling my own will.

God often has to pry my fingers off my desired outcome. Though I've felt devastated by his "no's," as I submit to his will—often with disappointment and tears—he assures me he's working for my good. I see only part of the picture. He

has a purpose in his denials.

The Father said “no” to the Son. And that “no” brought about the greatest good in all of history.

God is not capricious. If he says “no” to our requests he has a reason, perhaps 10,000. We may never know the reasons in this life, but one day we’ll see them all. For now, we must trust that his refusals are always his mercies to us.

### **Run to Your Father**

And now as we wait, still struggling to make sense of the storms in our lives, let us pray as our Savior did. Let us draw near to God, believe he can change our situation, boldly ask him for what we need, and submit our will to his.

Our Father’s plans are always perfect. They will always be for our good and his glory.

VANEETHA RENDALL RISNER

*This article can be found online at:*

*<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-to-pray-when-life-falls-apart/>*

# THE PARADOX OF PRAYER

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Praying is a paradox in the life of most Christians. When we reflect about the experience of praying, we find it is the easiest thing in the world, yet we are inevitably bad at doing it. And we find it is the point of feeling closest in our relationship with the God of the universe, but often it is also the point when we feel most distant from God.

And when we try to outline a theology of prayer, we find another paradox. On the one hand it seems so simple—I talk to God and he hears me. But when I start thinking a little harder, prayer becomes one of the most mysterious of activities. Do I change God’s mind by my prayers? But presumably he is in a much better position to make good decisions in his governance of the universe than me, so changing his mind would be detrimental. And he knows what I need before I ask, so why do I need to ask? And what if you and I pray for opposite things at the same time—how does God sort that out?

And when it comes to working out what to pray for, we experience another tension. It seems I can ask God for anything I want, but asking for what I want seems so selfish. I feel that I should censor my requests and only ask for things that are “good” or “needed”, but that makes prayer a straightjacket in which I only pray for the things God is going to do anyway.

So how does God (in his word) explain and resolve these paradoxes? The best place to start is to see how the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus for us affects our praying.

## **Praying in the Light of Christ**

Jesus died for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God ([1 Peter 3:18](#)). The effect of Jesus’ death is that all those who put their trust in him are justified; despite all we have done in rebellion and foolishness God says we are OK with him. Our record is clean and there is no guilt and shame before God any more. And this is the foundation of prayer. As Paul says in [Romans 5:1-2](#), “since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand”. This access is critical to prayer; without it we are cut off from God, locked out by our sin. With it we can approach God with freedom and confidence that he won’t reject us, that he won’t bring up our record and condemn us, but welcome us and our requests. And this new standing with God is indelible—it doesn’t depend

on how well I have behaved today, whether I have read my Bible, been to church or confessed every last sin. If the basis on which I relate to God is Jesus' death for me, then the door into the very presence and ear of the creator of the universe is always fully open.

Jesus' resurrection also effects our praying. The letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus is our High Priest, for ever alive, and permanently keeping the door to God his Father open for us. And he knows first hand all the struggles of life we experience, and so is able to sympathise with our weaknesses ([Hebrews 4:14-16](#)). As we pray, God isn't distant and remote, he doesn't laugh at our anxieties and phobias, but God the Son has been there. We can pray confident that we will get a sympathetic ear in our times of need. And so we have a freedom to pray about anything and anything—nothing is beyond the care of our heavenly Father.

### **Praying in the Spirit of Adoption**

As the risen Lord, Jesus pours out his Spirit to revive and transform us his people. And the Holy Spirit is integral to our praying, for he is the Spirit of Adoption ([Galatians 4:1-7](#)). He leads us to God, not simply as the Creator and Redeemer, but as our newly gained heavenly Father. We are now family, and it as children of God that we are able to pray. As a father delights to hear his children's needs and provide for them, so our heavenly Father does for us. So we are to pray in the Spirit, coming to God as "Father", free to ask anything of him we will. But never demanding, never dictating to God what he should do, but as a child trusting him to hear and respond with wisdom and love.

Being adopted children of God also carries implications for our future. We are God's heirs, waiting to inherit the kingdom our Father wishes to share with us. We are Jesus' brothers and sisters, and Jesus (the heir) will share his inheritance with us ([Romans 8:17](#)). Which means we will rule the new creation under and with Jesus. Like Adam and Eve did back in the beginning, but better. Or to put it another way, we are partners in our Father's business, owning a share. This is all by grace, and what enormous grace it is, as God takes us from enemies bound for destruction to members of the royal family with whom he shares everything.

### **Partners with God**

But partnering God in his business is not just in the future—we begin here and now. And prayer is central to our role, because as we pray, we participate in God's rule of his universe. God welcomes our input as he makes his decisions about how he will achieve his purposes, both in our lives and in the wider world around us. Even

though our advice is often naïve, foolish and mixed in motive, God still welcomes it and graciously builds it into his decisions. It makes you wonder just how influential you are, when you are in the privacy of your own room asking God to change the world.

Which helps us work out what to ask God for. As his children we are free to ask for anything. We don't have to censor our prayers, because we can trust God to only do what is good. But as our minds are renewed to "think God's thoughts after him", then the things we want God to do will converge with the things God wants to do. We are being made competent to rule the world like God rules—with compassion, justice and wisdom. This will be reflected in our prayers (like Paul's prayers in his letters—eg [Philippians 1:9-11](#), [Colossians 1:9-14](#))—the advice we give God will get better and better.

God has done everything to make prayer both simple and easy for his children. Access is ours through Jesus, help is ours by the Holy Spirit and privilege is ours by God's grace—there is every reason to be prayerful. We may not understand how our prayers fit with God's pre-planning of history—there is still much mystery surrounding those questions. But we do know God is responsive to our prayers.

Then why do we find praying so hard? That is the paradox, and it has to do with sin that clings so close. Even after becoming Christ's, we still have that deep-seated independent streak that keeps us from entrusting life to God. And we still have that apathy toward the welfare of others and the honour of Jesus that allows us to breeze through the days without asking God to change the status quo. So what to do? In the words of one brand name—JUST DO IT!

TIM THORBURN

*This article can be found online at:*

*<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-paradox-of-prayer/>*





