

PRAYER WEEK

18-24 September

2022

Blacktown Anglican Church

www.bac.org.au

Version 1.0 2022

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PRAYER WEEK

Introduction

Prayer is such a fundamental part of the Christian life. It is one of the simplest and yet most important expressions of the way we follow Jesus.

Prayer is, in part, our response to our knowledge of God. If we know that God is loving and cares for us, we will want to express that relationship in communicating with him. If we know that God is powerful, we will ask and plead with him to do big and powerful things that we are unable to do ourselves.

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. A chance to reset our habits, to engage in new practices, or recover old ones. Each year we set aside this week for us to focus on exactly this as a church family.

There is a classic phrase in history that states: “What the church prays is what the church believes”. The sentiment is that prayer reveals the things we truly believe in, the things we believe God is truly capable of and the things he cares about.

Our expression of prayer is often a very good witness to the depth of our faith. We can read many books or memorise many Bible verses, but it is our prayer life—both personal and corporate—that best displays where our heart is with God and his plans and purposes.

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

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DAILY DEVOTION #1

Each day we will read through one of the prayers in Paul's letters in the New Testament, reflecting on how it might shape our own prayer life.

Bible

Read Philippians 1:1-11

Think

1. What does Paul pray that the Christians in Philippi will grow in?
2. What does Paul pray will happen as a result of this growth?
3. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

"When we cannot pray as we would,
It is good to pray as we can."
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 to reflect God's mercy

O God, let us see the mercy of Christ and savour it for what it is.

Grant us power to comprehend His love. Incline us to read and ponder the stories of the mercy of Jesus in the Gospels. Let us so admire what He did that we imitate him. But let it be much more than external imitation. Let it come from the heart where we have been broken for our sin and where we have come to cherish mercy and live by mercy and hope in mercy and long for mercy.

Make the mercy of Jesus the greatest beauty of the Savior in our eyes. Let us behold, and beholding, become like Him. And bend this taste for mercy outward so that we show it. Make us full of His mercy that we might show mercy. Fulfill in us the command to do justice and love mercy. Let us love showing mercy. Make it so much a part of us that it is who we are. So unite us to Christ that His mercy is our mercy, and our mercy is a presenting of Christ. He is all we have to give in the end.

Glorify His mercy, Father, in our faith and in our patience. Thank You, oh, thank You, for Christ and your mercy to us in Him. In His name we pray. Amen.

DAILY DEVOTION #2

Bible

Read Colossians 1:1-14

Think

1. What does Paul thank God for concerning the Christians in Colossae?
2. What does Paul pray that these Christians will grow in?
3. What does Paul pray will happen as a result of this growth?
4. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

"To pray in Jesus' name [is], essentially, to reground our relationship with God in the saving work of Jesus over and over again. It also means to recognize your status as a child of God, regardless of your inner state."

Tim 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 God's help

To the Great I AM:

I need healing, Good Physician, come and manifest Your power.

I need faith, You who have given it to me, maintain, strengthen, increase it. Center it upon the Savior's work, upon the majesty of the Father, upon the operations of the Spirit.

Work it in me now that I may never doubt You as the truthful, mighty, faithful God.

Then I can bring my heart to You full of love, gratitude, hope, joy.

May I lay at Your feet these fruits grown in Your garden, love You with a passion that can never cool, believe in You with a confidence that never staggers, hope in You with an expectation that can never be dim, delight in You with a rejoicing that cannot be stifled, glorify You with the highest of my powers, burning, blazing, glowing, radiating, as from Your own glory.

Amen.

A prayer of the Puritans from The Valley of Vision.

DAILY DEVOTION #3

Bible

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Think

1. What does Paul thank God for concerning the Christians in Thessalonica?
2. How has God answered Paul's prayers?
3. What kinds of things reveal the work of God in a person's life?
4. How could this shape your own prayer life?

"The importance of prayer rises in proportion
to the importance of the things we should give up in order to pray"
John Piper

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 who have opportunity to display their faith very 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 of Trust in God's Heavenly Promise

My God, let me know and love you, so that I may find my happiness in you. Since I cannot fully achieve this on earth, help me to improve daily until I may do so to the full. Enable me to know you ever more on earth, so that I may know you perfectly in heaven. Enable me to love you ever more on earth, so that I may love you perfectly in heaven. In that way my joy may be great on earth, and perfect with you in heaven. O God of truth, grant me the happiness of heaven so that my joy may be full in accord with your promise. In the meantime let my mind dwell on that happiness, my tongue speak of it, my heart pine for it, my mouth pronounce it, my soul hunger for it, my flesh thirst for it, and my entire being desire it until I enter through death in the joy of my Lord forever. Amen.

A prayer of Saint Augustine.

DAILY DEVOTION #4

Bible

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

Think

1. What does Paul thank God for concerning the Christians in Ephesus?
2. What does Paul pray that these Christians will grow in?
3. What does Paul pray will happen as a result of this growth?
4. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing."
Martin Luther

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 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

Bible

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

Think

1. What does Paul ask God to do for the Christians in Ephesus?
2. What does Paul hope will result in this prayer being answered?
3. What makes you hesitate to ask God boldly for big answer to prayer?
4. How could this prayer shape your own prayer life?

"The prayer of a Christian is not an attempt to force God's hand, but a humble acknowledgement of helpless dependence...what we do every time we pray is to confess our own impotence and God's sovereignty."

J. I. Packer

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 God to shine in our hearts

O Lord Jesus Christ,
you are the sun of the world,
evermore arising, and never going down,
which by your most welcome appearing and sight,
brings forth, preserves, nourishes,
and refreshes all things,
as well that are in heaven as also that are on earth;

We beg you mercifully and faithfully to shine in our hearts,
so that the night and darkness of sins,
and the mist of errors on every side
may be driven away;
with you brightly shining in our hearts
we may all our life go without stumbling or offense,
and may decently and seemly walk as in the day time,
being pure and clean from the works of darkness,
and abounding in all good works
which God has prepared us to walk in;
you who with the Father and with the Holy Ghost
live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

A prayer of Thomas Cranmer.

DAILY DEVOTION #6

Bible

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Think

1. Who does Paul encourage Timothy to pray for? What is the hope in praying for these people?
2. What is the connection between our prayers and God's desires for humankind?
3. What makes prayer possible? What makes it necessary?

"Prayer in the sense of petition, asking for things, is a small part of it; confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and enjoyment of God its bread and wine."

C. S. Lewis

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 to start the day

O God, early in the morning I cry to you.

Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you;

I can't do this alone.

In me there's darkness, but with you there's light;

I'm lonely, but you don't leave me;

I'm feeble in heart, but with you there's help;

I'm restless, but with you there's peace.

In me there's bitterness, but with you there's patience;

I don't understand your ways, but you know the way for me.

O Heavenly Father,

I praise and thank you for rest in the night;

I praise and thank you for this new day;

I praise and thank you for all your goodness

and faithfulness throughout my life.

You have granted me many blessings;

Now let me also accept what's hard from your hand.

You will lay on me no more than I can bear.

You make all things work together for good for your children.

Lord Jesus Christ, You were poor and in distress, a captive and forsaken as I am.

You know all man's troubles; you abide with me when all men fail me;

You remember and seek me; It's your will that I should know you and turn to you. Lord, I hear your call and follow; Help me.

O Holy Spirit,

Give me faith that will protect me from despair, from passions, and from vice;

Give me such love for God and men as will blot out all hatred and bitterness;

Give me the hope that will deliver me from fear and faint-heartedness.

Amen.

A prayer of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

BIBLE STUDY

The Lord's Prayer

How have you learned to pray? Were there particular people, books or other resources that have shaped your own approach to prayer?

What do you find hardest about praying?

Read Matthew 6:5-15

Matthew 5-7 is the most famous of Jesus' teaching, known as the Sermon on the Mount. In it he teaches on many aspects of what it means practically to live in a right relationship with God, with a strong focus on the attitude of our hearts.

1. What kinds of prayer does Jesus say should be avoided? (vv. 5-8)
2. What can make it tempting to pray these kinds of prayers?
3. What is the value of praying together with other Christians? How has this been a help or encouragement in your own life?
4. In verses 9-13, Jesus teaches us a model for our own prayer life. Which themes of this prayer regularly occur in your own prayers? Which themes appear less frequently in your prayers?

5. Some people have learned various acronyms to help guide the content of their prayers. (For example, ACTS = adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication; PRAY = praise, repent, ask for others, yourself).

Are there tools such as these that you have used to help guide your prayers?

If so, how do they help in following the model Jesus has taught us? Are there any aspects of Jesus' prayer that they miss?

6. How important is it for Christians to repeat this prayer as Jesus has taught us? Is it more valuable as a set prayer to pray, or as a guide to the kinds of things to pray for?

7. In verses 14-15, Jesus connects our own forgiveness from God with our willingness to forgive others (also in verse 12). Why do Christians need to forgive in order to be forgiven? What would happen if we didn't?

8. What encouragement do we find in this whole passage for why we should pray?

Pray

Thank God for the gift of prayer.

Pray that we would avoid the errors that Jesus warns us of.

You might like to pray through the Lord's Prayer one line at a time, praying together for a few minutes on that theme before moving on to the next line.

PRAYING OTHER PEOPLE'S PRAYERS

"Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). There are few requests more important than this one. As Director of the Centre for Biblical Preaching, I regularly receive requests from pastors and lay preachers and, in essence, the request is, "teach us to preach." I think the request from the disciples is a more fundamental and important one.

In my late teens, and by then an enthusiastic young Christian, I read J.C. Ryle's, *Holiness*. The opening sentence in his chapter on "Prayer" was, "Prayer is the most important thing in the Christian life." That sentence hit me like the proverbial bolt of lightning, because prayer certainly wasn't the most important thing in my Christian life. To be honest, I've lived uncomfortably with that statement ever since. I suspect I'm not too far from the mark when I say that most of us don't do prayer well. We don't pray much, and we don't always pray the kind of prayers God wants us to pray. I think I've probably lived with 50 years of low-level guilt that, for all the progress I may have made in other areas of my Christian walk, my progress has been much slower in the important area of prayer.

Other People's Prayers

So, I've begun to pray other people's prayers. I sing other people's songs so why not pray their prayers (let me hasten to add I don't preach other people's sermons; except the occasional illustration). In response to the request of the disciples, Jesus gave them a prayer. No doubt, the Lord's Prayer teaches us about the character and content of prayer, but it's also a prayer we can pray.

I've kept a daily prayer diary for years. It contains a catalogue of the people, groups and causes I commit to pray for. Recently, though, it contains the prayers of other people. For example, on Tuesday and Friday mornings I pray Martin Luther's morning prayer:

Save me, I pray, today as well, from every evil and sin, so that all I do and the way that I live will please you. I put myself in your care, body and soul and all that I have. Let Your holy Angels be with me, and the ones I love, so that the evil enemy will not gain power over me.

Remembering the Devil

Actually, if it wasn't for Luther's prayer, I suspect that protection from the evil one would scarcely get a mention in my prayers. The apostle Paul speaks of Satan in most of his letters. Satan hindered him from returning to Thessalonica (1 Thess

2:18). He warns against giving Satan a foothold (Eph 4:27). He warns against overseers falling into the devil's trap (1 Tim 3:7). He reminds the Roman believers that God will soon crush Satan under their feet (16:20). Jesus, Paul and Luther were acutely aware of the wiles of the evil one. Apart from the Lord's prayer ("but deliver us from the evil one") he's been largely absent from my prayers.

My fellow trainer of preachers, Peter Adam, has shared with some friends prayers he prays for himself. Like so many, my temptation in prayer is to focus too much on the outer nature which is wasting away and too little on the inner nature which is daily being renewed. Peter's prayers have helped me reorient my priorities:

Help me to repent and pray each day, and not fail through moral lapse. Renew my inner nature day by day by your Spirit. Help me to find your compassion and comfort in times of trouble. Give me self-discipline in eating, drinking, sleeping, reading, working and exercising. Please help me to grow in purity, patience, wisdom, humility, grace, love, trust and openness.

Prayer and Competition

Peter, like me, is a preacher and trainer of preachers. One of the hidden sins of preachers is envy and competition. I love the German word, *schadenfreude*. It means taking pleasure in the suffering or failure of another. I certainly rejoice when another preacher preaches a very good sermon; just as long as it isn't as good as mine! For too long I've battled these sins, and for too long I've failed to name and confess them, and pray about them.

Help me stop comparing myself with others, feeling either jealous or superior. Help me not to find my self-worth in my preaching and people's response to my ministry. Help me to honour and love others in ministry and not compete with them. Take from me the desire to be noticed and praised by others. Take from me the fear of failure in preaching. Help me to desire your affirmation and approval, and to live for your glory and honour.

My perennial problem in prayer is forgetting. I become so absorbed with the events of my life I forget to pray important prayers. I need to confess my sins, remember the atonement, and repent daily. I need to remember to be thankful for everything; what the Anglican Prayer Book calls a "general thanksgiving." I need to pray for the spread of the gospel, the planting of new churches, the restraint of "wickedness and vice" in my community, the government. I am thankful for friends who remind to pray these kinds of prayers.

I teach preaching and when I ask preachers, “what part of preparing and preaching a sermon do you find the most difficult?” almost invariably, they reply, “Application.” It’s hard work and, for that reason, our applications are too often brief and clichéd. Again and again, we challenge our people to pray more, read the Bible more, witness more, but we rarely tell them how. Most people find these things, and many more besides, desirable but difficult. I think the unspoken response of many people is, “Yes, but tell me how!”

Lately, like I’ve done in this article, I’ve shared with people the kind of prayers I pray. And many are the prayers of other people. Every time I’ve done that, someone has asked me for a copy of my prayer. My job as a preacher, where appropriate, is not just to say, ‘what’ but ‘how’. God’s people want to pray, but their question is the age-old one, “Teach us to pray”. The prayers of other people have taught me to pray and rekindled my prayer life. May the prayers I pray also teach others to pray.

Mike Raiter

This article can be found online at:

<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/praying-peoples-prayers/>

FINDING PEACE IN AN UNANSWERED PRAYER

“Hey Dad, it’s me. I called to see if you know what you were doing 33 years ago today.”

“No, I don’t think I do.”

“You were looking at me for the first time.”

The silence was broken with a tearful voice: “You’d think I’d remember that, huh? I guess it is August 8th. Happy birthday, Sis” (his longtime nickname for me). Dad had never forgotten my birthday before. I wasn’t upset, though—I knew he hadn’t been himself lately. I’d called a few days earlier and he’d asked (for the third time) if I knew what “the baby growing in my belly was yet.” I reminded him it was a boy, and he was just as shocked and excited as he was the other two times I told him. Something wasn’t right.

What I didn’t know, though, is that the last time I’d ever speak to my dad was on my 33rd birthday.

Not Like Other Dads

Two days later, on August 10, 2013, my husband came to me in the dining area, led me by the hand into the hallway, and said words I’ll never forget: “Carrie, your dad died.”

My eyes widened in disbelief. Deep down I’d known something wasn’t right with him, but still—my dad? It felt so surreal. You know your parents will die one day, but it’s hard to grasp what that means before it happens. It’s hard to grasp what it means after it happens. Losing those you love is very strange.

My dad wasn’t like the dads my friends had growing up. He’s not like the dad my children have. But he was what God gave me—and for that I’m thankful.

I remember curling up with him and falling asleep in his oversize red recliner he loved so much. He coached my sports teams, took us on vacations, and made sure we had the gifts we wanted at Christmas. He tried, but his resolve to be a good dad could only last so long.

I was 11 when he left me, my mother, and my brother. He became a man of self-love, doing what he pleased for the rest of his life. There were years he didn’t try to have a relationship with me, nor did he seem to care when I tried to have one with him. We weren’t his priority anymore. He was his priority.

And over time he became lonely and miserable. His evident misery is what God used

to soften my heart toward him.

Heart Change

When I was a college freshman, the Lord convicted me about the way I felt about my dad. You'd think I was angry for what he'd done to our family, but I wasn't—I was apathetic. I didn't care anymore. He left us and I had no need to care about him.

But God changed my heart through a conversation with a non-Christian friend whose lifestyle had left him lonely and miserable. He felt he was at a breaking point. After our conversation, I returned to my dorm room with a heavy heart, praying for God to save my friend. Then I began to wonder how I could care so much about my friend's salvation but not about my own father's. God graciously used that conversation to melt my heart from deep indifference into inexplicable, unshakable love.

Father to the Fatherless

One of the first things I learned was that if I was going to love my father, I'd have to forgive him. I had grown cold to the sting of his sins against me, but the wounds were still there. Only by remembering how much God had forgiven me was I able to begin extending forgiveness to my dad (Luke 7:47). Jesus loved his enemies, and he summons and empowers me to do the same (Luke 6:27–33).

The Lord also taught me that to love my dad, my expectations would have to change. Loving him like any lost person—not just as “Dad”—gave me freedom. I didn't expect him to be a real father to me. He wouldn't ever be that unless God changed his heart.

But I didn't have to wait until that day to experience the love of a father.

God promises to be a “Father to the fatherless” (Ps. 68:5, NIV). My earthly father abandoned me, but my heavenly Father never will (Deut. 31:6). He promises to supply my every need (Phil. 4:19). He calls me his daughter.

The good news of the gospel isn't only that Jesus forgives my sin but also that he brings me into God's family and gives me the strength to love my earthly father—no matter what.

Unanswered Prayer

I prayed for my dad for years after God softened my heart toward him. I knew he was lost and desperately needed Christ, just like I did. I wanted him to experience freedom from the pain and loneliness I could so clearly see. I really believed he'd eventually see his need for a Savior. I believed he'd look back over his life, see where he'd failed, and find hope in the only place he could—Jesus! I prayed almost daily. I didn't know when it would happen, but I was certain it would.

I shared the gospel with my father often. A month before he died, I sat in his house, tears in my eyes, as I shared the importance of loving God, knowing Christ, and admitting his need for forgiveness. He wasn't convinced. It broke my heart, but not my faith.

That proved to be our last face-to-face conversation.

I was sad when Dad died, but even more, I was confused. Why didn't God save him? What do 20 years of unanswered prayer say about God's character?

Unexpected Peace

I still have unanswered questions. But I also have peace. My heavenly Father loves me more than I can imagine, and all he does is done in faithfulness (Ps. 33:4).

By the end, Dad knew I loved him, and I knew he loved me as much as he was able. He also knew the gospel. He knew where to go for mercy if he wanted it. I don't know what the last few days of his life were like. I wasn't there when he died. But I do know that as long as someone has breath, he can cry out to God—who delights in saving those who seek him—even if it's with his final breath (Luke 23:42–43).

Though I don't know if I'll see my dad again, I know I can trust my heavenly Father. I rest and hope in the fact that when I see God face-to-face, I'll lack nothing. Until that day, I take my anxious heart to his Word and find comfort in truths like this:

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. (Ps. 131)

Losing my dad has been sad. His death changed my life forever. But in my sorrow I rejoice. The Lord will hold me fast.

Carrie Kell

This article can be found online at:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/peace-unanswered-prayer/>

