

PRAYER WEEK

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Blacktown Anglican Church

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Luke Thomson

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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 a small section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, reflecting on how it might shape our own prayer life.

Bible

Read Matthew 6:5-8

Think

1. What kind of prayers does Jesus teach we should avoid?
2. How might you be tempted to fall into this kind of thinking?
3. How could this teaching shape your own prayer life?

The vitality of prayer lies largely in the vision of God that prompts it.
Drab thoughts of God make prayer dull.
J. I. Packer

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 begin the day

Father, thank you for the grace that has preserved my life to this moment. Now give me enough love for this day—a sense of love from you (so I'm not scared or driven), a welling up of love for you (so I'm not proud or selfish), and a resulting love for others (so I am not cold or distracted).

Let your Spirit illumine my mind and enlarge my heart for that. And because it means nothing to begin well if one does not persevere, I ask that you would continue and increase your grace in me until you have led me into full communion with your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, that I may see his beautiful and great glory.

And as I laid down in sleep and rose this morning only by your grace, keep me in a joyful, lively remembrance that whatever happens, I will someday know my final rising—the resurrection—because Jesus Christ laid down in death for me, and rose for my justification. In Jesus's name.

DAILY DEVOTION #2

Bible

Read Matthew 6:9-13

Think

1. What does Jesus include in this prayer that is perhaps unlikely to appear in your own prayers?
2. Why do you think this prayer is so short?
3. What is one aspect from this prayer that you could include in your own habits of prayer?

Many people think their prayers are never answered
because it is the answered ones they forget.

C. S. Lewis

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 Christian growth

Grant me, even me, my dearest Lord,
to know you, and love you, and rejoice in you.
And, if I cannot do these perfectly in this life,
let me at least advance to higher degrees every day,
until I can come to do them in perfection.
Let the knowledge of you increase in me here,
that it may be full hereafter.
Let the love of you grow every day more and more here,
that it may be perfect hereafter;
that my joy may be full in you.
I know, O God, that you are a God of truth,
O make good your gracious promises to me,
that my joy may be full;
to your honor and glory,
with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

A prayer of Saint Augustine

DAILY DEVOTION #3

Bible

Read Matthew 6:14-15

Think

1. What makes it hard to forgive those who sin against us?
2. Why does Jesus suggest that God's forgiveness of us depends on our forgiveness of others? What would happen if these were not connected?
3. How often do you pray for God's help to forgive others? How could you include this in your prayer life?

Prayer does not mean simply to pour out one's heart. It means rather to find the way to God and to speak with him, whether the heart is full or empty.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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 God's praise and glory

Dear Lord Christ,
give us your Holy Spirit and gifts
not for our own glory
but for the service and edifying
of all Christendom.
This is the only reason,
you give your Spirit,
as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12,
"you give to each one
according to your will,"
that is,
not for our our shame
or sin or vanity,
but for your praise and glory
and love and thanks
for your inexpressible grace and gifts
forever.
Amen.

A prayer of Martin Luther.

DAILY DEVOTION #4

Bible

Read Matthew 6:25-34

Think

1. How is prayer an appropriate response to worry?
2. Are there worries in your life that you are less likely to bring to God in prayer?
3. What worries do you need to bring to God in prayer today?

*Not to pray because you do not feel fit to pray is like saying,
"I will not take medicine because I am too ill."
Pray for prayer: pray yourself, by the Spirit's assistance, into a praying frame.
Charles Spurgeon*

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 for unity

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace;
give us grace seriously to lay to heart
the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions.
Take away all hatred and prejudice,
and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord:
that, as there is but one body, and one Spirit,
and one hope of our calling,
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Father of us all,
so we may be all of one heart, and of one mind,
united in one holy bond of truth and peace,
of faith and charity,
and may with one mind and one mouth glorify you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DAILY DEVOTION #5

Bible

Read Matthew 7:7-12

Think

1. What confidence should Christians have in prayer?
2. What can cause Christians to lack confidence in prayer?
3. How could this teaching shape your own prayer life?

All the passages throughout Scripture in which we are commanded to pray, are set up before our eyes as so many banners, to inspire us with confidence.

John Calvin

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 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 her ears that she may hear your word,

open her eyes that she may see your glory,

warm her heart with the forgiveness of sins

and cause her to trust in Jesus,

so that she will know with me the joy of serving you and the hope of life eternal.

Amen

A prayer of Simone Richardson

DAILY DEVOTION #6

Bible

Read Matthew 7:15-23

Think

1. How can prayer be a mark of Christian maturity?
2. What does your prayer life suggest about your dependence on Jesus?
3. How can our prayer life lead to bearing good fruit?

"Some people think God does not like to be troubled
with our constant coming and asking.

The way to trouble God is not to come at all."

D. L. Moody

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 end the day

O Lord my God, I thank Thee that Thou hast brought this day to a close;

I thank thee that Thou hast giv'n me peace in body and in soul.

Thy hand has been over me and has protected and preserved me.

Forgive my puny faith, the ill that I this day have done,

And help me to forgive all who have wronged me.

O Lord my God, Grant me a quiet night's sleep beneath Thy tender care,

And defend me from all the temptations of darkness.

Into Thy hands I commend my loved ones and all who dwell in this house:

I commend my body and soul : O God, Thy holy name be praised.

BIBLE STUDY

The prayer of Jesus

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

Read John 17:1-5

Do you find anything unusual about this prayer?

How does Jesus want to be glorified? For what purpose?

Read John 17:6-19

What does Jesus pray for his disciples? (vv. 11, 15-19)

Why do you think unity among Jesus' disciples is so important?

How does Jesus prayer prepare his disciples for future trouble?

Read John 17:20-26

How does it feel to know that Jesus is praying for us? (vv. 20-21)

What does Jesus want for all Christians? (vv. 21-23, 24, 26)

Live it

As you reflect on Jesus' prayer in this chapter, how might it further shape your own habits of prayer in the areas of:

- Who you pray for?

- What you pray for them?

Pray

Thank God for the gift of prayer.

Pray that we would live according to Jesus' desires for us as expressed in this prayer.

Pray for unity among Christians as they live out their faith in Jesus.

Pray for humble patience and perseverance for Christians in the face of opposition.

Pray for the glory of Jesus to be known to all.

STOP PRAYING FOR STUFF (AND START PRAYING FOR GOD)

In the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4), Jesus teaches his disciples about the priorities that should shape the prayer life of every believer. This model prayer is full of requests—for daily bread, forgiveness, leadership, and deliverance.

But it also shows that our greatest need is not just to get stuff from God. Our greatest need is to know God himself.

Our Misguided Prayers for Stuff

We've all prayed for important things in the past and found our prayers weren't answered; God didn't do what we thought he should. When we view prayer as nothing more than a request and don't receive what we ask for, we often start to doubt. We wonder why we should even bother praying in the first place.

Even though the questions are honest, this kind of thinking misses the whole point of prayer. The point of prayer is not just getting God to do stuff. Notice what Jesus says in Matthew 6:7–8: "When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases . . . for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

If God already knows what you need before you even ask, what's the point? He already knows, so why are you asking? You might think that God is up in heaven taking notes, as if our prayers are informing him of things he doesn't already know about. No, he already knows what you need—and that's why the primary point of prayer is not actually to get something, but to know Someone.

Heart of Prayer: Knowing God

That realization will change your prayer life: the primary point of prayer is not to get something—it's to know Someone. When you go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret, there is a reward awaiting you: intimacy with your heavenly Father through prayer. The heart of prayer is what happens when you're alone with the Father.

Please hear this: the most important thing in your life is not your family, your spouse, your kids, your job, your finances, or your health. The most important thing in your life is your personal intimacy with God, because that affects everything else.

Your family life depends on personal intimacy with God in your heart. Your kids

need this from you more than they even need you to put food on the table—this reality will change the way you parent. Your marriage, your job, your finances, and the people around you need this from you. Everything flows from this.

Planning God-Centered Prayers

That's why Jesus says, "Go in your room and close the door." Set aside a time. Find a place. Get alone with God. That one practice will revolutionize your life. So, where's your place? When's your time? If you don't have an immediate answer to those questions, then find an answer immediately.

Jesus promises that there is a reward awaiting you in time spent alone with the Father in heaven. Here's the map: set aside a time, go to a specific place, and just be alone with God. In his teaching about prayer, Jesus was saying, "The Father has so much for you! If you want to experience all he has for you, then this is how you pray."

The God of the universe is inviting you into a relationship with him that is marked by intimacy. This is what happens behind closed doors between you and God—it's not just you and some random person; it's you and the Creator of the universe! I long for you to experience this kind of intimacy with God. If that seems so far off, then I want to help you take a step forward in the practice of prayer.

It simply starts with setting aside a time, going to a place, and getting alone with him.

David Platt

This article can be found online at:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/stop-praying-stuff/>

TEACHING CHILDREN TO PRAY: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In all that we teach our children, the greatest and most fundamental thing we can do is model a praying life before their beautiful little eyes and their perceptive little ears. Though we are doing this already, as we continue to depend daily more and more on God and enjoy our communion with him, we would do well to keep in mind the following principles of prayer to the end that the Holy Spirit might use us sinful and broken vessels as models of a dependent and repentant, faithful and prayerful life in communion with our Lord. I've separated the following principles into three categories: Foundational Principles, Situational Principles, and Motivational Principles.

My hope in this article is to set down some of the principles I've learned about prayer in order to provide parents with a few guiding principles that I have tried to model before my children, albeit imperfectly. There are certainly many more principles we could add to this short list, but I offer them simply as a starting point for your own further reflections and study.

Foundational Principles of Prayer for Children

1. Let them see that prayer is grounded in the Word. Prayer is nourished, and strengthened by God's Word. E.M. Bounds wrote, "The Word of God is the food by which prayer is nourished and made strong."
2. Let them see that prayer is united to the Word. Prayer is communion with God and thus twofold in essence: Listening to God as he speaks to us in his Word by the Holy Spirit, and communing with God by communicating to him, verbally or nonverbally.
3. Let them see that prayer is conformed by the Word. If our minds are not informed, and thus renewed by the Spirit through the Word, and our hearts not conformed by the Word, then our prayers will be futile intellectual musings on the one hand or moody emotional ramblings on the other.
4. Let them see that God is not simply responding to our prayers, he is responding to us his children through the means of prayer. He doesn't simply answer prayers. He answers us, his people, and he always answers us, sometimes saying yes, no, wait, or yes but even greater than you could have imagined.
5. Let them see that while sometimes our prayers include all aspects of our communion with God, our prayers often include simply one aspect of prayer. When John prays at the end of Revelation, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20), he is directly supplicating Jesus to return, and although he only employs one aspect of

prayer—supplication—he is still truly praying.

6. Let them see that just as the disciples went to the Lord and asked him to teach them to pray, so we can and should ask the Lord to help us in our prayer, in our weakness, ignorance, and stubbornness.
7. Let them see that prayer isn't simply telling God what we want or need but responding to him in dependent adoration from a heart overflowing with what we know he wants for our holiness and for his glory and his kingdom. We pray with our eyes focused on his kingdom, not our own kingdoms.

Situational Principles of Prayer for Children

1. Let them see that prayer is continual communion with our Lord, with life's regular interruptions and the sins of our hearts. John Wesley wrote, "In souls filled with love, the desire to please God is continual prayer."
2. Let them see that prayer is not something we need to get ourselves cleaned up for, in the right attitude for, or in the right mood for, but that we simply pray and let the Holy Spirit do his necessary work in us and through us. Jonathan Edwards wrote, "The true spirit of prayer is no other than God's own Spirit dwelling in the hearts of the saints. And as this spirit comes from God, so doth it naturally tend to God in holy breathings and pantings. It naturally leads to God, to converse with him by prayer."
3. Let them see that we pray not just in generalities but in particulars, as we fervently keep asking, seeking, and knocking as we go to our Father who wants to hear us and commune with us as we ask him for even the littlest things in life as we focus on his glory and our enjoyment of him.
4. Let them see that our words of prayer don't necessarily need to be complicated and weighty and poetically beautiful in order to be genuine, but that they can be short and simple, especially when our children are young so that we are not exasperating them. And let us be careful not to instill cleverly worded rhyming prayers that they may simply memorize them for the sake of a quick cute prayer that can easily become a prayer of meaningless empty platitudes. Samuel Chadwick wrote, "Prayer is not a collection of balanced phrases; it is the pouring out of the soul."
5. Let them see authenticity, not only in our own prayer lives but in our prayers themselves. We don't want to live our lives in such a way as to show off our life of prayer. Our prayer cannot be an act or a performance. Martin Luther wrote, "Prayer is not performance but climbing up to the heart of God."

6. Let them see and hear us pray the Lord's prayer as young as they are able to learn it and let them see us expand on each petition of the Lord's prayer in our own prayers. And as we use certain patterns of prayer that we are accustomed to, let us make sure that we're careful not to demand that pattern as the only biblical pattern from which if they depart then they will fear they are not praying properly.
7. Let them see that there is not just one appropriate posture for prayer, but that even as evinced in Scripture, we can pray in many postures. Let us be discerning as to whether we force them to close their eyes and position their heads or bodies in precisely the same way we do. Let them simply observe our devotion, however we express it in a particular situation. Let them see that they can pray while kneeling, bowing, smiling, singing, hugging, crying, with faces down, with faces up, with hands folded, holding hands, or hands outstretched—there is not one right way to pray at all times and situations. Day by day, our children will observe our posture in prayer and, by God's guiding grace, will naturally find themselves showing reverence to the Lord in manifold postures.

Motivational Principles of Prayer for Children

1. Let them see that prayer is not foremost a programmatic rite but the natural, organic overflow of a heart that belongs to God—that prayer is like breathing as we inhale adoration and thanksgiving, we exhale confessions and supplications. Thomas Watson wrote, "Prayer is the soul's breathing itself into the bosom of its heavenly Father." Oswald Chambers wrote, "If we think of prayer as the breath of our lungs and the blood from our hearts, we think rightly. The blood flows and the breathing continues—we are not conscious of it but it is always going on."
2. Let them see that we pray not because we are partially in need of something from God, but because we are in desperate need for God himself—that what he gives or withholds is secondary, but that he himself is our great reward, our inheritance, our life, our all.
3. Let them see that prayer is the soul's greatest instinct and passion and that we pray because we can't help but pray and desire communion with our Father. Help them to see that we pray not primarily so that we can tell someone we have prayed but simply because we feel like praying so that they can see that we are sincerely passionate about prayer because we are sincerely passionate about God. Jonathan Edwards wrote, "Prayer seemed to be natural to me, as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent."
4. Help them see that prayer is not only a means to an end but an end in itself,

namely, communion with our Lord, just as our worship of him is an end in itself.

5. Help them to see us pray genuinely and with genuine motives. When we're having a tough day or when there has been an argument in the home or when our kids know that we may be sad or upset let us not instantly put on the façade of a superficial smile, but show them that we can go directly to the Lord without hesitation and let them see us pray for help to pray, for comfort, for joy, for a tender heart, and for a child-like faith that clings to Christ as our only hope.
6. Let them see that we pray not as foreigners but as members of a covenant household of faith and that prayer is not only something that we do in public, in private, before eating, before bed, during our time of disciplining them, but that it is something we have the great privilege of participating in at any time because we are the children of our heavenly Father who can always come to him and who will never be ignored.
7. Let them see that our communion with our Father is the most important and the most enjoyable engagement of our day because it is the occasion when we get tell our Father we love him, trust him, and need him—just as our children want daily to express their love, trust, and need of us. Let them see that while pray throughout our day, we also have a regular habit of scheduled daily prayer. J.C. Ryle wrote, "Oh, dear friend, if you love your children, I charge you, do not let the early impression of a habit of prayer slip by. If you train your children to do anything, train them, at least, to have a habit of prayer." And D. A. Carson wrote, "We will not grow in prayer unless we plan to pray. That means we must self-consciously set aside time to do nothing but pray."

Most of these principles apply not only to children but to all of us, and as we continue to think, study, and write about prayer, let us remember to pray and to commune with our Lord as we will do forever, glorifying him and enjoying him by the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit and the ongoing intercession of Christ Jesus our great high priest who prays for us even now. Jesus' prayer for us is the sustaining means of our abundant life in him now and forever.

Burk Parsons

This article can be found online at:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/teaching-children-to-pray-guiding-principles/>

BOOK RECOMMENDATION

Do you ever find yourself uncertain of what to pray? Or perhaps you feel limited to praying for the same things in the same way all the time?

This little series of books, “5 things to pray” is a wonderful collection of short, punchy reflections in the form of offering you 5 things to pray each day.

Each day provides you with 5 items for prayer, along with a short Bible verse, and a sentence or two for reflection.

It will allow you to grow the depth and breadth of your prayer in very manageable and simple steps.

This series covers a great range of topics, including 5 things to pray for: your city; your spouse; your kids; our world; in a global crisis; your church; the people you love; your parents.

No matter how well you feel your prayer life is, this whole series will provide freshness in guiding you to a deeper engagement in prayer. Highly recommended!



SIMPLY
START

PRAYING

Simply Start Praying is an opportunity to kick start your prayer life.

You may have never prayed before. Or perhaps never found a good, consistent habit. Maybe you struggle knowing exactly what to pray, or how to pray.

1

**REFLECT**

2

**REMIND**

3

**RESOURCE**

Simply Start Praying will help grow your prayer life in three ways:

1. Reflect on the Bible's teaching on prayer
2. Remind yourself to pray through the Prayer Mate app
3. Resource your prayer life with pre-set prayers and informed updates

Check it out on our website: <https://bac.org.au/prayer/>

