



A GUIDE FOR PRAYER
SPRING 2018 EDITION

21 DAY SPRING PRAYER GUIDE

Dear Reader,

If there was one thing that we desire for Heartland Church, it is that we would be a sincere people of prayer! After all, every great revival, move of God and movement was birthed out of a prayer movement. Find praying people, and you'll find God's hand.

Since we can remember, Heartland Church has given the beginning of our year to 21 days of prayer. This year, our challenge to you and our rally cry is to "Pray First." In every situation, whether good or bad, let's try to pray before we act. Many times people act first and then want God to bail them out of that situation, but prayer should be our first response, not our last resort.

Understanding the necessity of prayer is not enough. In order for it to become a part of our life, it needs to become something we look forward to doing. We're convinced most people don't enjoy prayer because they have never been taught how to pray. That's where this simple prayer guide can help. Enclosed is our personal effort to give you a guide to help you develop a devotional life with Jesus using Bible reading, journaling and prayer.

This is our attempt to make prayer more personal, and this booklet is designed to bring joy into your time with God. When you discover the beauty of daily conversation with Him, you'll experience the presence of God that will change your life.

Once you learn how to pray, prayer can become a part of everyday life. And then...

Before the day begins —
Before you go to bed —
Before you go to work or school —
Before you send that text —
Before you eat, drive or travel —
When bad things happen —
Before bad things happen —
In every situation — **PRAY FIRST!**

Prayer changes everything!

- *Pastor Dusty Dean*

How to Use this Prayer Guide:

In this guide, we're going to help you understand how to pray more effectively and to hear God more clearly. The first 7 days are devoted to hearing God while the second 14 days are all about your prayer life.

While this guide will help give you specific topics to pray about, we want you to use it as a daily devotional as well. As a result, here is a specific guide of the sections that will be included each day and how you can effectively use these sections to help you grow spiritually.

Section 1: Devotional Thought

The devotional thought is an aspect of leadership that we all face and will help you jump in to today's thought.

(Recommended Time: 1-2 minutes)

Section 2: Scripture Reading

The Scripture reading is a passage of Scripture that we want you to study. You will notice that we only reference the passage and do not include it. That is because we want to encourage you to open a physical Bible, preferably not an electronic form, and read the text.

(Recommended Time: 5-10 minutes)

Once you have read the passage, reread it a second time and use a highlighter or pen to underline key words that stand out to you in the text.

Section 3: Journaling

The third section is a place for you to journal. Here we want you to write your observations about the text as well as how you believe the Holy Spirit is challenging you to grow you in the specific area. You can get as detailed as you like in this area. *(Recommended Time: 5-10 minutes)*

Section 4: Prayer

The final section will give you a daily prayer challenge to consider in your personal prayer time. However, in addition to the daily prayer challenge, we also encourage you to take the time to consistently pray daily about a short list of items that you will write down on the next page. Pray the daily Scriptures over your own life, pray about the daily challenge and then pray for your specific list that you will have written down for the duration of the 21 days. *(Recommended Time: 5-10 minutes)*

When using all four of these steps, each day can take as few as 15 minutes and as long as 35-40 minutes. By doing these steps, this will help you to not only pray over the 21 day period, but also to build a healthy and habitual devotional and Bible reading life as well.

PERSONAL PRAYER TARGETS:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

Pray for those in authority and those under your authority.

MY GOVERNMENT

President: _____

National Leaders: _____

State Leaders: _____

City Leaders: _____

MY FAMILY

Spouse: _____

Children: _____

Parents: _____

Siblings: _____

Extended Family: _____

MY CHURCH

Pastors: _____

Connect Group Leader: _____

Connect Group Members: _____

MY LIFE

Employer: _____

Co-workers: _____

Employees: _____

Teachers and Professors: _____

THOSE I AM INFLUENCING

Close Friends: _____

THOSE WHO NEED GOD

MY NEEDS

How Do I Pray Scripture?

One of the most powerful things that you can do is pray Scripture. Yet I've found that when I challenge our church to make this a daily habit, most people don't know what I'm talking about. As a result, I want to share with you four practical methods to pray the Scripture - none of which require special tools or advanced theological training.

1. The Personalize-It Method

Simply substitute your name (or the person's name you are praying for) in the place of pronouns or nouns in Scripture.

For example, if I were personalizing John 3:16, I'd write something like this: "For God so loved Dusty, He gave his one and only Son so that Dusty would not perish but have everlasting life."

Or, for Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in Dusty Dean will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Put your name in the text, and you'll strengthen your faith and encourage yourself.

You can also re-write the verse as if God is talking directly to you. For example, Philippians 1:6 would be: "I, who began a good work in you, Dusty, will carry it on to completion."

2. The Pronounce-It Method

The "pronounce it" method of biblical meditation is an easy method for meditating on Scripture — and getting every ounce of spiritual nutrition you can out of it.

You start with a verse and read it over and over again. Each time you read the verse, you emphasize a different word. It's the simplest way to start unlocking Scripture. You can do it even if it's the first time you've ever opened up a Bible. It's simple but amazingly powerful. Each time you emphasize a different word, you get a different perspective.

Take the first part of Colossians 3:16 for example. The verse says, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you” (NLT).

The first time you read the verse, emphasize the word “let.” “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you.” What does it mean to let? It means “give permission.” I open the door; it’s my choice. We have to choose to let the Word of God dwell in us richly.

Then, read the verse again and emphasize “word.” “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” That means I need to get God’s Word in my mind.

Then, emphasize the third word of the verse, “Christ.” You’re not dwelling on what some philosopher, guru, or talk show host has to say. You’re dwelling on the words of Christ! I don’t want to let the word of the world dwell in me, but I do when I spend my time watching TV instead of reading God’s Word.

Then you focus on the word “dwell.” “Let the Word of Christ dwell within you.” The word “dwell” means “to hang there for a long time.” It’s not rushing through God’s Word so you can get on with the rest of your day. To let the Word of Christ dwell in you is to let it live within you.

Then you stop and emphasize the word “in.” It’s good to have the word of Christ around you. You can put the Word of God on a plaque or a bumper, but it won’t change your life until you let it in your life.

Then focus on the word “you.” The Bible isn’t just God’s Word for your pastor, a seminary professor, or your Sunday School teacher; it’s God word for you! The Bible is instruction for every single believer.

Finally, emphasize the word “richly.” What does that mean? It means the opposite of poorly. In other words, richly means lusciously, extravagantly, and profoundly. God doesn’t want his Word to be a poor substitute in your life. He wants it to create beauty in your life.

See all the great jewels you discovered in this passage just by focusing on one word at a time? You didn’t need a seminary degree or a great library of reference tools. You can do this!

3. The “Pray-It” Method

In this method, you put whatever passage you’re studying in first-person and pray it back to God. Using this method, you don’t have to wonder whether you pray or read the Bible first during your quiet time. You do them together! And, you know your prayer will be answered because it’s in Scripture.

Here’s how you might do it with Psalm 23: “Thank you, Lord, for being my shepherd. Thank you for making me lie down in green pastures. Thank you for leading me beside quiet waters. Thank you for restoring my soul. Thank you for guiding me in the paths of righteousness for your name’s sake.”

Stop and think about the prayer for a bit. Has God ever made you lie down? Sometimes we don’t have enough sense to rest or relax. Sometimes God forces you to lie down. Sometimes he makes you lie down in green pastures because you are not taking care of yourself. That’s something to thank God for!

Have you ever felt down and depressed and were restored by God? Does God lead you down right paths? Of course! Psalm 23 provides a great opportunity to thank God for what he has done in your life.

Meditating on Scripture using the “pray-it” method will open up a whole new world to you in God’s Word.

Day 1

Sunday, January 14th

HEARING GOD'S VOICE

What would happen in your own personal life if you began to crave God's words and guidance more than you craved your daily bread? That's what happened in Job's life. He came to a point in his life where God's words became the energy and strength that he needed. His complete sufficiency was not found in the things of this world, but in God alone.

But, how do I hear his voice? Is He really still speaking today? I want you to take heart because God is a communicator. He created the gift of communication and He does speak, and we do have the ability to hear Him—and even respond to His voice. If God is still speaking, we should do everything in our power to recognize his voice and listen!

Isaiah wanted to be able to hear the voice telling him the way that he should walk in and we should want the same thing. The act of listening is what is so desperately needed in our prayer lives and for most people, it's confusing and lacking.

Over the first seven days, this devotional will focus on helping you HEAR God's voice in your personal prayer time.

Remember some of the ways that God speaks to you:

God speaks through His word. He has already revealed much of His plan for us through the Scriptures. Spending time reading His word is one of the best ways!

God speaks through Whispers. He will speak softly to our spirits, give us dreams, vision or instruct us through circumstances. He also will direct our thoughts to His plans.

God speaks through His people. At times, God will speak His heart for us through other Christians through the form of encouragement, correction or guidance.

Day 2

Monday, January 15th

CAN I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION?

There is hearing, and then there is listening.
Hearing is the ability to perceive sounds and information.
Listening is paying attention to them.

Today's Scripture readings in Jeremiah are terribly sad, but sadly not uncommon. These Old Testament accounts are huge red flags warning us of danger ahead when we do not give God our full attention with all our heart, mind, and strength. Why? Well, if we aren't paying attention to God and His ways, we're headed in the wrong direction—going backward and not forward. Too often, these wrong paths take us to dark and destructive places.

The culprit of distraction is usually something we see as innocent such as a full schedule, raising kids, a quest for more of something, or even an electronic gadget with a host of fun surprises!

To my knowledge, both of my children all have perfect hearing, but too often their listening can be passive! Sometimes the only thing that will grab their attention is my secret code word: ice cream. Instantly they're hooked and reply, "Wow! Really, Dad?" I then confess, "No, I just needed your attention!"

Honestly, I can be a passive listener, too, like when the smart phone has my concentration over my family. "Mmmm ... what's that again, sweetheart?"

We may think of these examples in silly ways, but this is really not okay. It's dishonoring to people. And when it comes to ignoring God, it's tragically undervaluing Him and downright rebellious.

If we're going to fully follow our heavenly Father, we're going to need to pay attention to His messages! Remember, His divine communication comes in a variety of formats: His Word, a fellow believer's counsel, a Bible Plan, a dream or vision, a whisper, or a nudging thought. Yes, the mode of God's communication is vast because He's a BIG God and a communication expert desiring to continually connect with you!

Day 3

Tuesday, January 16th

WHO ARE YOUR SPIRITUAL ADVISORS?

God will often communicate His will and wisdom to you through other followers of Christ! I can't even begin to count the times God has used another Christian to get a message through to my heart! I hear His whispers through pastors, a podcast, my friends, my children, a blog, or someone in my Connect Group. I actually view a few of them as my "Spiritual Advisory Board." These are: my spouse, a mentor, a prayer partner, a friend, and my parents.

How about you? Do you seek out and listen openly to other believers you respect? Staying consistently connected with other Christians (especially those who are growing and grounded in God's Word) is vital for your own personal faith journey.

Listening to them is not enough, though. Do you often apply or put into practice the advice or wisdom you've heard?

Wise up and remain involved in Christian community! Listen to your faith-family. We need them, and they need you. Today's reading from Proverbs 18:2 tells us frankly it's a mistake to be a "know-it-all."

Personally, I don't want to play the fool. I need help. I need wisdom. I need to choose to remain humble and teachable so I can hear God's direction, correction, and affection. I need my heart to remain humble and teachable - because God will often speak to us through His other children.

Scripture Reading:

Ecclesiastes 7:5

Proverbs 13:20; 12:15; 18:2

Journaling:

Who is on your Spiritual Board of Advisors?

Who needs to be on your Spiritual Board of Advisors?

Day 4

Wednesday, January 17th

DECEIVED BY DESIRE

The origin of sin started with these lies: “God isn’t good”, “He can’t be trusted”, and “He’s holding out on us.” Certainly this deception continues today. And if that’s not bad enough, like Eve, our natural cravings join forces with these lies! All this deception is needed in order for Satan to attempt to separate us from God.

Eve saw the fruit and thought it looked really good and pleasing. She was also seduced by the lure of greater enlightenment, knowledge, and possibly even power. You will be like God. Boy, was she duped!

How about you? How many times have you been overpowered by the lust of your eyes and your limited understanding? I’m not trying to depress you with that question but alert you because, friend, it doesn’t have to be that way!

Living connected to God’s voice means we follow His instructions to acknowledge Him. Give Him glory, thanks, and praise for each moment because He is with you! This holy connection means we desperately place our trust in Him in every circumstance and shut our ears and eyes from all that would deceive our hearts and minds.

This world isn’t my world, and it’s not yours, either! A new Heaven and Earth await those who with patient endurance continue to trust their Savior. We don’t have to settle for chasing the wind of every passing trend. We don’t have to be afraid of missing out on the “good stuff” because we know great eternal rewards await us. And, we know our God is truly the only Good Stuff! He is our All in All, our Sufficient One, our Completer!

Scripture Reading:

Genesis 3:4-6

Day 5

Thursday, January 18th

STOPPED-UP EAR SYNDROME

Adam and Eve knew God firsthand! The coming generations of their family members also knew God or at least knew of Him well. But slowly, over the many years, most people stopped thanking and acknowledging God as their source. Sin increased.

Most sins are just symptoms of a more deeply rooted sin: the sin of stopping up our ears to the truth of God and instead listening to a lie. When we stop recognizing God as the Giver of all good things, we stop seeing clearly. We stop thinking wisely. We refuse to listen to truth. Romans 1 plainly reveals this reality.

And here's a sobering statement: refusing to listen to the truth is, essentially, rejecting God. Now, as Christians, we obviously embrace God's Word as truth. But we must keep our ears unclogged by recognizing and rejecting false truths and remaining tuned in to God's voice.

Equally sobering is the fact that truth rejecters often drag others into their deception, as we learned from today's reading in Genesis. Think about these questions. Who is at risk when you're not listening to God? Your spouse? Your friends? Your boss? Your children? Maybe even a complete stranger whom God wanted you to minister to?

I think right now would be a good time for me to stop writing so you can prayerfully listen.

Scripture Reading:

Genesis 3:6

Romans 1:21-32

Journaling:

Who is at risk when you stop listening to God?

Prayer:

Lord, teach me to listen regardless of what my emotions are telling me.

Day 6 Friday, January 19th

STRANGER DANGER

Many in the body of Christ have become increasingly vulnerable to the deceptions of the voice of the stranger. Listening to God's voice becomes a real challenge due to competing, ungodly chatter. Tragically, they begin to doubt God's character and the truth He teaches in His Word.

We see the origin of this problem starting with garden dweller, Eve. And I wonder...Why did Eve ever indulge in listening to the serpent's sly shenanigans? Why didn't she recognize that this was the voice of the stranger? I wonder. How well did Eve really know God, her Shepherd? She seemed so easily swayed by the enemy's lies. Why was Eve instantly gullible?

I believe that even though Eve knew truth, she wasn't firmly grounded in truth. She knew what God "said" but never fully grasped Who He was—completely trustworthy and good. She didn't understand He would never hold back any good thing from her.

Before eating the forbidden fruit, she was unaware of evil, unaware of lies, and unaware that she could be deceived into disobeying her Father. But this is not true for us! We are not unaware! Praise God we have the Word of God as our truth guide, the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Truth) as our Counselor, and Christ Jesus as our Savior and truthful Advocate! Yet, like Eve, we too get sucked into listening to the stranger's lies. Why?

One reason is, too often, we actually entertain the enemy's lies through our own entertainment. TV, Internet, movies, books, and magazines, which are most often quite void of God's voice, have overtaken our societies. Nevertheless, we'll spend unspeakable hours with these godless, lying voices while our minds and hearts are diluted, polluted, and malnourished of the living, active, and inspired Word of God!

We need to know our Shepherd! We need to be nourished with His green pastures. We need to draw near to Him in order to follow His voice.

Day 7

Saturday, January 20th

GETTING TO KNOW THE GOOD SHEPHERD

I'd like to ask you two questions for your consideration:

What is it like when you spend time with your heavenly Father?
What is it like to talk with Him?

What I'm alluding to here is the topic of prayer. I think most people get hung up on this hyper-used word, "prayer." We over-spiritualize it. You see, God knows we are mere man, yet we try to impress Him somehow with "good" praying. And then, we get distracted and give up until the next time we "try." In doing this, we've missed the whole point of what prayer is meant to be!

Prayer is simply how we connect with God. It's how we relate to Him. And just how does God want us to come to Him in prayer? Well, His greatest desire is to have our total heart, mind, and strength as we read in Deuteronomy 6:5, right?

To begin with, He wants us to enjoy Him—to focus on Him and not your "prayer."

We should always come to Him just as we are, giving our desperate, unworthy, yet wholly loved selves to our all-powerful, all-sustaining glorious, yet fully compassionate Father. And when we do, we find the overflowing cup of His strength, restoration, wisdom, peace, righteousness, and joy. In His presence is the abundant life. He is the Living Water and the Bread of Life.

When we pray, we should not only talk but also listen. Seek to hear and follow His good paths. Come rejoicing, come playful, come weary, come doubting or afraid. Come to Him in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death. Draw in close and listen to His comforting words of life and hope. And so, we should come to Him continually—in the humdrum and in every other possible situation. As we do, we begin to know our Shepherd. I mean truly know Him.

Paul E. Miller teaches in his book *A Praying Life*, "You can't get to know God on the fly. You don't create intimacy; you make room for it."

Day 8 Sunday, January 21st

LEARNING TO PRAY

The first seven days of this guide, we focused on the idea of listening and learning to hearing God's voice, but now, we want to transition into helping you use what you've learned and make it applicable in your next two weeks of prayer. Through the next several devotionals, we'll hit on several aspects of prayer that can make your communication with God more fruitful.

The next two days will feature the most expansive Bible reading list focused only on the Psalms. I encourage you to really push through. Praying the Psalms regularly is a great tool for prayer. This is the time in our devotions where fatigue often begins to set in and people struggle. I want to encourage you to be MORE faithful over the next two weeks than you were in the first.

Take time to meditate over what you read and while we'll give you a list of Psalms over the next couple of days, try to pray them constantly. See if you can summarize at least one of the chapters in your journal.

I believe that in time, you'll start to notice your life bearing fruit and you'll see breakthrough. I believe that there can be a new sweetness in Christ. Interestingly, the more that you see Christ, you'll also see the error of your sin. The closer we get to Christ, the more we see our humanity.

Prayer is the only entryway into genuine self-knowledge. It is also the main way we experience deep change—the reordering of our loves. Prayer is how God gives us so many of the unimaginable things he has for us. Indeed, prayer makes it safe for God to give us many of the things we most desire. It is the way we know God, the way we finally treat God as God. Prayer is simply the key to everything we need to do and be in life. We must learn to pray. We have to.

Day 9 Monday, January 22nd

THE PSALMS IN DETAIL

With a little insight, we find out that the Psalms are full of various types of prayers.

There are Psalms such as Psalm 27, 63, 84, 131, and the “long hallelujah” of Psalm 146 –150 that depict adoring communion with God. In Psalm 27:4, David says that there is one primary thing he asks of the Lord in prayer—“to gaze on the beauty of the Lord.” While David did in fact pray for other things, he means at the very least that nothing is better than to know the presence of God. Therefore he says: “O God . . . my soul thirsts for you. . . . I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, I will praise you” (Psalm 63:1–3). When he adores God in his presence, he says his “soul is satisfied as with the richest of foods” (Psalm 63:5). This is indeed communion with God.

But there are other Psalms that take a far different tone. Many Psalms are of complaint, or cries for help. Some are calls for God to exercise his power in the world. There are also Psalms that invoke expressions of the experience of God’s absence. In these moments, prayer is used as a struggle. Psalm 10, 13, 39, 42–43, and 88 are just a very few examples. Psalm 10 begins asking why God “stands far off” and “hides” himself in times of trouble. Suddenly the author cries, “Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless” (Psalm 10:12). Yet then he seems to speak almost to himself as well as to the Lord. “But you, O God, do see trouble and grief. You consider it to take it to hand. . . . You are the helper of the fatherless” (Psalm 10:14). The prayer ends with the psalmist bowing to God’s timing and wisdom in all matters yet still fiercely calling out for justice on the earth. This is the wrestling match of kingdom-centered prayer. The psalmist, then, affirms both the communion-seeking and kingdom-seeking kinds of prayer.

The reason that I share this with you is because I believe that many, if not all, of our experiences are found in the Psalms and so we can pray these Psalms in our own lives without guilt. God meets us exactly where we’re at.

Day 10

Tuesday, January 23rd

HE'S YOUR FATHER

Romans 8 is one of the richest chapters in all the Bible covering many subjects and thoughts. Romans 8:15-16 is the place of focus today and it's helpful for our conversation on prayer.

What we learn in Romans 8 is that God loves us and that we have the privilege to approach him and cry out to Him as a loving father. Notice the language as you read these series of verses today. Underline the key words that are unique to this text that identify God as a father and us as His children.

Many struggle with the idea of a loving Father because of the view that they hold of their own father. As a result, it's so important for us to recognize that a Biblical definition of what a father does and allows is so important. We cannot form our worldviews of God "as father" off of our experiences, but from God's word. Notice the descriptive verbs used in these two verses and notice how God actually speaks to our sonship in Him.

This is so important as you pray. You must know that God isn't afraid of your cries as a earthly father isn't afraid of his own child's. You must know that God isn't embarrassed to identify with you—you have nothing to fear, you are His and He is proud!

Scripture Reading:

Romans 8:15-16

Journaling:

If you can truly see God as a loving Father, what does that change in your prayer life?

Prayer:

Talk to God like a Father in your prayer time today? Ask Him to help you keep that perspective in your own life despite your perceptions based on your experiences of what a father is and does.

Day 11

Wednesday, January 24th

TO KNOW HIM BETTER

It is remarkable that in all of his writings Paul's prayers for his friends contain no appeals for changes in their circumstances. It is certain that they lived in the midst of many dangers and hardships. They faced persecution, death from disease, oppression by powerful forces, and separation from loved ones. Their existence was far less secure than ours is today. Yet in these prayers you see not one petition for a better emperor, for protection from marauding armies, or even for bread for the next meal. Paul does not pray for the goods we would usually have near the top of our lists of requests.

Does that mean it would have been wrong to pray for such things? Not at all. As Paul knew, Jesus himself invites us to ask for our "daily bread" and that God would "deliver us from evil." In 1 Timothy 2, Paul directs his readers to pray for peace, for good government, and for the needs of the world. Paul is not giving us a universal model for prayer in the same way Jesus did but he reveals what he asked most frequently for his friends—what he believed was the most important thing God could give them.

What is that? It is—to know him better. Paul explains this with color and detail. It means having the "eyes of their hearts . . . enlightened" (Ephesians 1:18). We often teach about how our heart has eyes and that our heart is the control center of the entire self. We see our life through the eyes of our heart—through our experiences and emotions. That's why having the "eyes of the heart enlightened" means that we have God penetrate our hearts and grip us so deeply that it changes the whole person.

We may know that God is holy, but when our hearts' eyes are enlightened to that truth, then we not only understand it cognitively, but emotionally we find God's holiness wondrous and beautiful, and we avoid attitudes and behavior that would displease or dishonor him.

Day 12

Thursday, January 25th

GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT PRAYER

The seventeenth-century English theologian John Owen wrote a warning to popular and successful ministers:

“A minister may fill his pews, his communion roll, the mouths of the public, but what that minister is on his knees in secret before God Almighty, that he is and no more.”

To discover the real you, look at what you spend time thinking about when no one is looking, when nothing is forcing you to think about anything in particular. At such moments, do your thoughts go toward God? You may want to be seen as a humble, unassuming person, but do you take the initiative to confess your sins before God? If you are like me, you probably wish to be perceived as a positive, cheerful person, but do you habitually thank God for everything you have and praise him for who he is? You may speak a great deal about what a “blessing” your faith is and how you “just really love the Lord,” but if you are prayerless—is that really true? If you aren’t joyful, humble, and faithful in private before God, then what you want to appear to be on the outside won’t match what you truly are.

Just prior to giving his disciples the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus offered some preliminary ideas, including this one: “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. . . . But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen . . . in secret” (Matt 6:5–6). The infallible test of spiritual integrity, Jesus says, is your private prayer life.

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 6:5-6

Journaling:

What excuse do you most often use for not spending time in prayer?
What do you think daily prayer actually change in you and your life?

Day 13

Friday, January 26th

GOD'S GREATNESS THROUGH PRAYER

The Bible is all about God, and that is why the practice of prayer is so pervasive throughout its pages. The greatness and glory of God in our lives is never made more evident through placing the prioritization of prayer at the top of our lives. The Scripture is one long testimony to this truth.

In Genesis we see every one of the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—praying with familiarity and directness. Abraham's doggedly insistent prayer for God's mercy on the pagan cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is remarkable (Gen 18:23ff). In Exodus, prayer was the way Moses secured the liberation of Israel from Egypt. The gift of prayer makes Israel great: "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7).

To fail to pray, then, is not to merely break some religious rule—it is a failure to treat God as God. It is a sin against his glory. "Far be it from me," said the prophet Samuel to his people, "that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23). King David composed much of the Psalter, God's inspired prayer book, filled with appeals to "you who answer prayer" (Psalm 65:2). His son Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem and then dedicated it with a magnificent prayer. Solomon's main petition for the temple was that from it God would hear his people's prayers—indeed, Solomon's highest prayer was for the gift of prayer itself. Beyond that, he hoped those from other nations would "hear of your great name . . . and pray toward this temple" (1 Kings 8:42). Again we see prayer is simply a recognition of the greatness of God.

Scripture Reading:

Genesis 18:23

Deuteronomy 4:7

1 Samuel 12:23

Psalms 65:2

1 Kings 8:42

Day 14

Saturday, January 27th

THE ALL ENCOMPASSING POWER OF PRAYER

Jesus Christ taught his disciples to pray, healed people with prayers, denounced the corruption of the temple worship (which, he said, should be a “house of prayer”), and insisted that some demons could be cast out only through prayer. He prayed often and regularly with fervent cries and tears (Heb 5:7), and sometimes all night. The Holy Spirit came upon him and anointed him as he was praying (Luke 3:21–22), and he was transfigured with the divine glory as he prayed (Luke 9:29). When he faced his greatest crisis, he did so with prayer. We hear him praying for his disciples and the church on the night before he died (John 17:1–26) and then petitioning God in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Finally, he died praying.

Immediately after their Lord’s death, the disciples prepare for the future by being “constantly in prayer” together (Acts 1:14). All church gatherings are “devoted . . . to prayer” (Acts 2:42; 11:5; 12:5, 12).

The power of the Spirit descends on the early Christians in response to powerful prayer, and leaders are selected and appointed only with prayer. All Christians are expected to have a regular, faithful, devoted, fervent prayer life. In the book of Acts, prayer is one of the main signs that the Spirit has come into the heart through faith in Christ. The Spirit gives us the confidence and desire to pray to God and enables us to pray even when we don’t know what to say. Christians are taught that prayer should pervade their whole day and whole life—they should “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Prayer is so great that wherever you look in the Bible, it is there. Why? Everywhere God is, prayer is. Since God is everywhere and infinitely great, prayer must be all-pervasive in our lives.

Scripture Reading:

Hebrews 5:7

Luke 3:21-22; Luke 9:29

John 17:1-26

Acts 1:14; 2:42; 11:5; 12

I Thessalonians 5:17

Day 15

Sunday, January 28th

I CHANGED MY MIND

What is prayer in the fullest sense? Prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him.

Throughout most of the great Old Testament book, Job cries out to God in agonized prayer. For all his complaints, Job never walks away from God or denies his existence—he processes all his pain and suffering through prayer. Yet he cannot accept the life God is calling him to live. Then the skies cloud over and God speaks to Job “out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1). The Lord recounts in vivid detail his creation and sustenance of the universe and of the natural world. Job is astonished and humbled by this deeper vision of God (Job 40:3–5) and has a breakthrough. He finally prays a mighty prayer of repentance and adoration (Job 42:1–6).

The question of the book of Job is posed in its very beginning. Is it possible that a man or woman can come to love God for himself alone so that there is a fundamental contentment in life regardless of circumstances (Job 1:9)? Yes, this is possible, but only through prayer.

Scripture Reading:

Job 38:1; 40:3-5; 41:1-6

Job 1 (entire chapter)

Job 9 (entire chapter)

Journaling:

Has there ever been a time in your life where you were perfectly content regardless of the circumstances? What was different about you in those moments?

Prayer:

Thank God for his provision and the circumstances of your life. Count them pure joy and ask the Lord to help you see everything you are walking through with a new lens.

Blank lined writing area with 28 horizontal lines.

Day 16

Monday, January 29th

JESUS IS THE LENS

The power of our prayers lies not primarily in our effort and striving, or in any technique, but rather in our knowledge of God. In yesterday's devotion, we talked about Job. If you read it, you might think, "God spoke audible words to Job out of a storm. I wish God spoke to me like that." The answer is—we have something better, an incalculably clearer expression of God's character. "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . . the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:1–3).

Jesus Christ is the Word of God (John 1:1–14) because no more comprehensive, personal, and beautiful communication of God is possible. We cannot look directly at the sun with our eyes. The glory of it would immediately overwhelm and destroy our sight. We have to look at it through a filter, and then we can see the great flames and colors of it. When we look at Jesus Christ as he is shown to us in the Scriptures, we are looking at the glory of God through the filter of a human nature. That is one of the many reasons that Christians pray "in Jesus' name."

Prayer is the "intimate conversation" of believers with God. It's through Jesus, that we've been access to God.

Scripture Reading:

Hebrews 1:1-13

John 1:1-14

Ephesians 2:18

Journaling:

Make notes of the things that you observe and learn about Jesus from these Scripture readings?

Prayer:

Pray through your daily lists that you created.

Day 17

Tuesday, January 30th

STIRRED UP TO PRAY

Paul gives us a term that really helps us describe the kind of prayer we're going after—unceasing. Unceasing prayer brings the glory of God down. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says we are to “Pray without ceasing.” That doesn't mean you're not doing anything else. It means that just as you are always physically breathing in and out as you go about your day, you should always be spiritually in a conversation with God. Always talking: “Yes, Lord;” and “See that, Father?” and “Help me, God,” and always, always in an attitude of prayer.

When it comes to prayer, God Himself is in the stirring-up business. He doesn't do it for His own good but for our good. We need to pray unceasingly because it is immeasurably good for us! Let's look closely at God's move to stir up Jeremiah (and us) to prayer: “The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time while he was still shut in the court of the guard. Thus says the LORD who made the earth, the LORD who formed it to establish it—the LORD is His name: ‘Call to Me, and I will answer and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known’” (Jeremiah 33:1-3). Within these verses are four distinct promises from God to Jeremiah related to prayer. Do you see them?

Scripture Reading:

Hebrews 10:23-25

Journaling:

Write down the four promises that are found in Jeremiah 33:1-3

Prayer:

Ask God to bring the people and events into your life that will stir you up to pray even more.

Day 18

Wednesday, January 31st

MOSES' VERTICAL MOMENT

When I hear the name Moses, I picture a giant in faith with a long grey beard and weary eyes as he stands on a mountain with arms outstretched. I admire that vision of Moses, but I resonate more deeply with the Moses of early Exodus. Rash and aggressive, younger Moses tried to accomplish his calling in the flesh, ending quickly with a corpse buried in the sand. Forty years later God gave Moses a second chance but he seemed stuck on lesson one: "I can't."

In Exodus 3, God appeared to Moses "in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush" (v.2) that burned but was not consumed. In response to God's call, Moses refused to be God's messenger of deliverance, wallowing in his own inadequacy. I've done that too; have you?

Have you struggled to embrace what God wanted you to do and for a time refused to do it? There have been many moments in my own life that I've delayed in starting something that God has called me to do in fear I would lack the patience and the perseverance with people.

Many times, I've feared starting something new for fear that I would become a failure. I understand Moses' initial refusal to do a big job. But God pressed in as He does with all of us. In the end God's greatest provision for Moses' or my or your sense of inadequacy is simply and profoundly His presence with us. The answer to Moses' persistent pattern of "I can't" was not "Yes, you can, Moses" but "I can, I will, I AM."

Scripture Reading:

Exodus 3:10-11

Journaling:

What are you saying NO to God about right for fear of failure?
How do you think that prayer can change your response to that call?

Prayer:

Ask God for the courage to give Him your yes!
Ask that he show you His plans and purposes for your life!

Day 19

Thursday, February 1st

GOD'S INVITATION

Each of the promises from God can usually be summarized in a word. Here's one to take note of and it's the word: Invitation. Earlier this week, we looked at Jeremiah 33:2 where God Himself is giving the invitation: "Thus says the LORD," which is God's way of saying, "Jeremiah, take a memo."

This title, "LORD," is God's personal, covenant name. That's God making a covenant commitment to you. If you have turned from your sin and embraced Jesus Christ by faith for your forgiveness, God has made a covenant with you. He has said, "I have sworn by My own name" (see Hebrews 6:13-20). God has promised to do some things for you. Now it doesn't matter what you've done because God has made some commitments regardless of your past.

The enemy would say to us, "Because of what you did, it's over with you and God."

But God says, "I am the LORD. I have made a covenant with you." Our relationship with God may look like simple exchange of affection between two parties, but the truth is we can't keep up our end of things. We can't match anything God does for us. But God does His part even when we fail to do ours. Paul captured how this works in 2 Timothy 2:11-13, "If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself." God has made a covenant with us and He will not deny Himself. This is an awesome promise.

Scripture Reading:

II Timothy 2:11-13

Day 20

Friday, February 2nd

ANSWERS

I believe that God answers every prayer. But it's crucial for us to remember who we're talking to in prayer. We're not giving God orders and He's not at all hesitant about the way He answers.

The first answer is "Yes." That's the most frequent answer you get to prayer. I have never asked for strength and not received it. I have never, ever prayed for wisdom and not received it. But I have often not prayed for wisdom and regretted the decisions that I made. When I've applied James 1:5 and recognized my lack of wisdom and asked God to supply, He has delivered! Most biblical praying receives an immediate "Yes."

God's second answer to prayer is "No." That's why James 4:2 says, "You do not have because you do not ask." But the only time you get a "no" is if you pray for stupid stuff or if you pray for good stuff with a timeline. I have found God very unresponsive to my ultimatums. God doesn't respond to blustering, bluffing, or threats. If we're praying foolishly, we'll get a "no."

But if I'm praying according to God's will, entrusting my future in God's hands, He has a third option: "Wait." The only thing between you and the delayed "yes" is time. How often do we forfeit our "delayed yes" through doubt? God has made promises about a lot of stuff, but He retains the sovereign choice of timing. So we pray unceasingly, and we wait patiently.

Scripture Reading:

Isaiah 46:8-11

Journaling:

What do you feel like God has recently said "yes" to in your life?

What do you feel like God has recently said "no" to in your life?

What are you patiently waiting for God to give a "yes or no" answer to?

Day 21

Saturday, February 3rd

HIDDEN THINGS

One of the promises of Scripture is that God will make hidden things illuminated to us. We see this found in a previous Scripture that we read in Jeremiah 33:1-3.

Illumination comes from “I will . . . tell you . . . hidden things.” Illuminations are insights that no one can see but me and God. The Hebrew term is used to describe fortified cities that were inaccessible and unassailable. God knows things about our circumstances: great things, mighty things, hidden things. This is one of the greatest blessings of prayer: God tells us things. But sometimes even His Word doesn’t become clear to us until we are quiet and prayerfully listening. Unceasing prayer is a conversation that expects God to speak to us directly. That can’t happen without moments of attentive silence during which we anticipate hearing from God.

God tells us why people are the way they are or why certain things had to happen as they did. God reminds us what good is being accomplished that we can’t see. God tells us how the future will be better, even though it seems impossible now. God sees everything that is hidden to us, and He chooses to tell us about them.

Here’s the truth: Though I know what God has shown me, I don’t know what the hidden things are for you. Isn’t it awesome to think that God has some hidden things just for you? How awesome to know something that only you and God know? God told Jeremiah that prayer is the condition in which He tells us hidden things. “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”

Scripture Reading:

Jeremiah 33:2-3

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