

31 DAYS of PRAYER

A month of biblically based prayers excerpted from *Praying the Scriptures for Your Life* by Jodie Berndt.

1 CONNECTION May I remain in you and bear much fruit; apart from you I can do nothing. (John 15:5 NIV)	2 GLORY TO GOD Rescue me when I call on you, and I will give you glory. (Psalm 50:15 NLT)	3 OBEDIENCE Work in me, giving me the desire and the power to do what pleases you. (Philippians 2:13 NLT)	4 LOVING OTHERS Make me humble, gentle, and patient, bearing with others in love. (Ephesians 4:2 NIV)	5 FORGIVENESS May I be kind and compassionate, forgiving others just as you forgave me. (Ephesians 4:32 NIV)	6 SHAME OFF YOU Thank you that I am a new creation in Christ. The old has gone; the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV)	7 BEING A FRIEND Let me value others and put their interests above my own. (Philippians 2:3–4 NIV)
8 FRIENDS Give me friends who will love not just with words but with actions. (1 John 3:18 NIV)	9 MARRIAGE Let us protect and trust one another; fill our hearts with hope and equip us to endure. (1 Corinthians 13:7 NIV)	10 CHILDREN Show me how to pour out my heart in your presence, lifting up my hands to you for the lives of my children. (Lamentations 2:19 NIV)	11 HELP ME Hasten, O God, to save me; come quickly, Lord, to help me. (Psalm 70:1 NIV)	12 SUFFERING Heal my broken heart; bind up my wounds. (Psalm 147:3 NIV)	13 WAITING Equip me to be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (Romans 12:12 NIV)	14 WORRY Help me not to worry about anything but pray about everything, telling you my needs and thanking you for what you have done. (Philippians 4:6 NLT)
15 COMPARISON Show me how to be what I was made to be, without comparing myself to others or trying to be something I'm not. (Romans 12:6 MSG)	16 YOUR WORDS Let no unwholesome talk come out of my mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up. (Ephesians 4:29 NIV)	17 GOD'S WORD May I take delight in your law, meditating on it day and night so I will bear fruit and prosper. (Psalm 1:2–3 NIV)	18 LISTENING Whether I turn to the right or to the left, may I hear your voice, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." (Isaiah 30:21 NIV)	19 RESTING Lead me beside quiet waters; refresh my soul. (Psalm 23:2–3 NIV)	20 TALENTS May I use my gifts to serve others, faithfully stewarding your grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:10 NIV)	21 PURPOSE Let your favor rest on me; establish the work of my hands. (Psalm 90:17 NIV)
22 TIME Teach me to number my days and spend them as I should. (Psalm 90:12 TLB)	23 FINANCES Help me be wise, making the most of every opportunity and knowing what your will is. (Ephesians 5:15–17 NIV)	24 WISDOM Instruct me and teach me in the way I should go; counsel me with your loving eye on me. (Psalm 32:8 NIV)	25 JOY Make known to me the path of life; fill me with joy in your presence. (Psalm 16:11 NIV)	26 HEALTH Hear my prayer; see my tears; heal me, Lord. (2 Kings 20:5 NIV)	27 AGING May I bear fruit, even in old age, and always stay fresh and green. (Psalm 92:14 NIV)	28 TRUST Keep me in perfect peace, even when I don't know what you are doing. Help me trust you. (Isaiah 26:3 NIV)
29 SHARING Equip me to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. (Mark 16:15 NIV)	30 DETAILS Make me willing to cast all my cares on you—even the small ones—because you care for me. (1 Peter 5:7 NIV)	31 GRATITUDE Teach me to rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances. (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 NIV)	<p>“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” John 15:7</p> <p>©JodieBerndt jodieberndt.com</p>			

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Praying the Scriptures for Your Life

31 Days of Abiding *in the* Presence,
Provision, *and* Power of God

JODIE BERNDT

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Praying the Scriptures for Your Life

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*To Robbie—
forever and always.*

*For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless.
Psalm 84:11*

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Foreword

“True, whole prayer is nothing but love,” wrote Saint Augustine.

It’s a tender question: is the only reason we don’t truly pray because we don’t truly love?

If we are not praying regularly, is it only because something else is regularly loved more than God?

I don’t know where I was when the conviction struck me so hard it stung for days. The only reason we fail to pray is because we’ve made an idol out of self. The only thing that prevents me from praying more—*is me*.

I look in the mirror, in my calendar, in my own heart and confess, I’ve had to painfully face it’s my own inflated sense of self-importance, the elevation of my plans, my work, my agenda, that keeps me from prayer-communion. That’s called idol worship. It’s a striking thing of deep conviction to realize: I don’t pray enough because I’m practicing idol worship.

But what else is it when I too often have something else that comes first, or one more thing to do, or anything else that’s more distracting, appealing, satisfying, instead of stopping my work to still my heart and speak words back to the very Word whence I came?

The truth I came to sit with is: my prayer life reflects my theology—or my idolatry.

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Unless we make time to genuinely pray, our other priorities betray what we genuinely think of Jesus. The extent of prayer in one's life is a direct function of whether something else has been set up as more important than God. I began to whisper it gently to my soul: Do not work so hard for Christ that you make no time to pray to Christ. He is the lifeblood of all work, all joy, all hope, all being, all communion.

I began to slowly turn and learn: when I choose to be still in prayer is when I know that He's God . . . and I am not.

When I bow, idols topple.

Our life changed when we as a family began to embrace a daily rhythm of prayer, by gathering in a circle in our kitchen as the sun comes up, and bowing our heads in prayer first thing, before any of us do anything else. The house of our Lord is a house of prayer—and we realize that prayer is the only way we can keep ours standing. Each morning, we pray honestly, vulnerably. We pray through tears, we pray His Word, we pray each one of us around the circle, we pray first thing, we pray our hearts to the One who gave us a new heart. This is what we began to do: we returned to our first love.

We discovered: prayer is not what we do before we begin our work. Prayer is our life's work.

Prayer becomes what we live when we want to get hold of God, not just get hold of what we want. And real prayer isn't about changing God's mind, but about finding God's heart, and letting His heart change our minds.

Is this why God urges us to pray without ceasing? We need to pray *without* ceasing—because it's the only way to live *in* communion. Without prayer, how can our life and His will have anything in common? Without prayer—we have no fellowship, no relationship, no worship.

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But when we choose to enter a life of prayer, Christ enters into our thoughts, takes captive every thought because we are most captivated with Him, Him having first place in our hearts and hours and priorities—and the conversation never ends, and we have our heart’s real desire—communion with Christ.

“I know of no better thermometer to your spiritual temperature than this, the measure of the intensity of your prayer,” wrote Charles Spurgeon.

And the relief is? None of us pray alone.

Though you think no one is praying with you, the Ultimate One is praying for you.

The One who breathes stars breathes prayers for you, the One whose words spoke the world into being uses priceless words over your being, the One who made time lives beyond time, controls all of time, uses all of His time to pray for you, because you are priceless to Him.

Jesus is praying right now that the Spirit comforts you, strengthens you, anoints you with fresh oil of brave joy. Jesus is seeing us through, carrying us through, praying us through. And when we’re struggling to pray, it’s Jesus Himself who prays for all we’re struggling with. There are arms that won’t let you go, there are plans that won’t abandon you, there are prayers that won’t fail you.

Jesus won’t get off His knees until you are in His arms.

Nothing makes you more fiercely brave than knowing Jesus is fiercely praying for you.

Hard times don’t need to understand what God is doing—like they need to know that God’s standing with us, that He’s kneeling in prayer for us at all times.

The Word-formed, scriptural prayers of Jodie Berndt have led me into our Abba Father’s heart on some of my very hardest

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days. When my spirit didn't know how to find words, the pages of Jodie's prayer books find the Word itself, giving His own words to us, that we may pray them back to the Word Himself. Jodie has become a prayer companion for me, the gripping, Word-saturated pages of her prayer books reaching over and grabbing hold of my hand and holding me like a lifeline, tied to the heart of God. Books from Jodie's *Praying the Scriptures* series have become the gifts I give for all occasions—because there is no greater gift than praying on all occasions, without ceasing. And there is nothing we need more than to learn how to become a prayer warrior—instead of a panicked worrier. Worry is just the facade of taking action—when prayer really is.

When I think of how prayer is always our most real work, our most meaningful act, I call to mind again the story of Abba Paul, that desert monk who wove baskets and prayers. And while other monks lived close enough to cities to sell their handiwork in the markets, Abba Paul lived such a distance that the cost of transportation would exceed any profits from selling the baskets. Nonetheless, each day he collected palm fronds and worked as faithfully as if basketmaking was his primary means of support. And come the end of the year, when his cave overflowed with long months of toil, he took a torch to the work of his hands and the flames devoured and rose higher and crackled long into the night. Then, come morning, the heat died away, satiated. And Abba Paul stood in the long quiet and the wind blew away the ashes of all his work.

It is not the products of our days that will matter in the end, but the prayers of our days. *Prayer is not what we do before we work, nor is prayer what we do instead of our work. Prayer is our life's work.*

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Because by and large the work of our hands, the to-do lists, the plotting across planners—while all needful acts of service, these acts will become ash in wind. “On the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person’s work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames” (1 Corinthians 3:13–15 NLT).

What survives fire? Our places of work won’t. Neither will the actual work of our hands. Abba Paul’s baskets didn’t. But what was woven into the baskets did—the prayers. *Ora et labora*—pray and work—but what is everything? Weave prayers *through* all the work.

The prayers we weave into the matching of socks, the stirring of oatmeal, the washing of floors, the coming and going and all the moments of our work, these survive fire.

Turn these pages, and return to your first love—for prayer is nothing but love for Love Himself.

We were loved to life by the Word, by Him kneeling close and kissing us to life with His warm breath, and when our words return to Him in prayer, we are returning home. Prayer is our coming home.

We become whole—when our breath becomes prayer.

Ann Voskamp, from the farm, early 2021,
author of the *New York Times* bestsellers
The Broken Way and *One Thousand Gifts*

— Part 1 —

An Invitation to Abide



What Is Abiding?

“Remain in me, as I also remain in you.”

John 15:4

I remember, back when I was a young girl, coming into the kitchen and seeing my mom’s spiral notebook—the one in which she made a fresh to-do list each morning. “Make List” was always the first thing she wrote, followed by “Read Bible,” and then on the third line, “Pray.”

“Why do you do that?” I asked one day. “I mean, you do these things every day. Do you really need to jot yourself a reminder? And can’t you combine reading your Bible and praying into one ‘Time with God’ or whatever?”

“It’s not that I need a reminder,” Mom said with a laugh. “It’s just that I want to feel like I’ve accomplished something—and if I get my list made, then I have. And when I spend time with the Lord, if I count that as two things instead of just one, I get to check more stuff off!”

Today, as a grown woman who makes her own lists (and who is not above noting something she has already done, just for the pleasure of checking it off), I appreciate my mother’s perspective. And I bet you do too. Because we can’t help ourselves: We *want*

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to be people of impact. We *like* being productive. We are created, God says, to do good works—works he prepared in advance.¹ We want to get to it!

Which is partly why, when I read John’s gospel and got to chapter 15, I didn’t really think it was intended for me.

I mean, I know that *all* of God’s Word was written for *all* of his people, but this particular passage—one where Jesus tells us to “remain” in him eleven times in only ten verses—just seemed so *passive*. Like it had been written for people who had time to be still—people with fewer children and less laundry than me. People who were content to sit and wait for their name to be called, like you do at the DMV.

DMV people, I thought, *would appreciate John 15*.

The fact that I had memorized huge chunks of this chapter (well, a few verses anyway) in the King James Version for my grandmother, who wanted Bible verse recitals as her Christmas gift every year, didn’t help. King James did not say *remain*. He said *abide*. And even *abideth*.

I didn’t even know what that meant.

Nor did my much younger brother. We’d grown up going to a Christian family camp every summer, one where we learned to sing a song called “Abiding in the Vine.” Having no idea what that was, four-year-old David sang what he thought were the lyrics: *Fighting in the barn! We’re fighting in the barn!*

And honestly? To me, David’s version made much more sense. I mean, anybody could picture what a barn fight looked like, but *abiding*? In a *vine*? Not so much.

Still though. Eleven mentions. In just ten verses. Clearly Jesus thought that abiding—or remaining or whatever it was—was something important.

What Is Abiding?

What It Means to Abide

I needed help. I needed wisdom from a varsity Christian. I turned to Warren Wiersbe, a Bible brainiac with a knack for putting the grass where the sheep can reach it. I opened his *Be Transformed* and read this: “To ‘abide’ . . . means to keep in fellowship with Christ so that His life can work in us and through us to produce fruit.”²

I liked that. The idea that God can work *in* us and *through* us to do stuff excites me. It makes John 15 sound dynamic. Active. Productive—in the best kind of way.

I wanted more.

I picked up Andrew Murray’s *Abide in Christ*, a book that was originally published in the late 1800s. The language has supposedly been updated for the “modern reader,” but buckle up, because it’s no *People* magazine:

If, in our orthodox Churches, the abiding in Christ, the living union with Him, the experience of His daily and hourly presence and keeping, were preached with the same distinctness and urgency as His atonement and pardon through His blood, I am confident that many would be found to accept with gladness the invitation to such a life, and that its influence would be manifest in their experience of the purity and the power, the love and the joy, the fruit-bearing, and all the blessedness which the Saviour connected with the abiding in Him.³

I read that—that one single sentence—and I felt like Murray was getting at something really profound. But I wasn’t exactly sure what. So I read it again.

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And again.

And then, the third time through, it hit me. Murray's point, in a nutshell, was this: If Christians got as excited about staying *connected* to Christ as we did about *coming* to him in the first place, we'd experience more power. We'd feel more joy. We'd become people of impact. The deepest cry of our souls—for an encounter with Jesus that will sustain us even when our hearts fail and our prayers feel empty and flat—would be satisfied.

I could feel my toes starting to tingle. John 15—and the whole idea of abiding—was not as dull as I had thought. I went back to my bookshelf and dug out R. A. Torrey. He wrote *How to Pray* in 1900.

(And if you think you are sensing a theme—as in, a lot of input from dead authors—you are right. My library is full of old stuff. I figure that if somebody's work has lasted for fifty, a hundred, or even more years, it must be good. Not a passing fad. Not like platform sneakers, for instance. Or kale.)

And sure enough, Torrey delivered:

To abide in Christ . . . is to renounce all life independent of Christ, and constantly to look to Him for the inflow of His life into us, and the outworking of His life through us. When we do this, and in so far as we do this, our prayers will obtain that which we seek from God.⁴

Our prayers will obtain that which we seek from God. Oh my goodness. Could there be a more captivating invitation than that which leads to tangible answers to prayer? Taken together with Wiersbe's promise of a fruit-bearing life and Murray's assurance that abiding opens the door to things like power and joy,

What Is Abiding?

Torrey's idea—that connection to Christ is what facilitates a powerful prayer life—was enough to push me over the edge. I was ready to abide.

It's Not Up to Us

But . . . how? I knew what it looked like to *come* to Christ in the first place—to acknowledge my sin, to receive mercy and grace, to enter into a love relationship with the Lord—but what did it look like to *stay*? What if I got distracted? What if I wound up like my dog Minnie?

Minnie is a white Labrador puppy. She comes when she's called, and she will gladly sit still for a treat. But then, once she's inhaled whatever bone-shaped snack you give her, her attention is prone to wander. She loves us, to be sure, but throw a squirrel or a ball in the mix and she's gone.

Could that happen to me? When I come to God—when I taste and see that he is good—how can I be sure I won't go running after some squirrel? How can I know I will stay? Is abiding a willpower thing?

I went back and reread all the biblical scholars and—to a person—here's what they said:

It's not up to us.

Sure, we can choose whether or not we want to lean into God, and whether or not we'll surrender to him. But when daily life presses in—when we have to stop being “holy” and attend to the toddler who's sick, the coworker who misunderstood our email, the spouse who can't find the butter—that doesn't sever our connection to Christ. God's grace does not stop working once we get saved.

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Paul talks about this very thing in his letter to the Philippians: “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion,” he writes.

“God is working in you,” he continues, “giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”

And then, lest there be any doubt that God is the one who always makes the first move, Paul adds this: “I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me.”⁵

When we reach out for Christ, we discover that he has already reached out to us. The love that saves us is the same love that keeps us attached. We don’t have to struggle or strive for connection; rest is a gift, and abiding is what equips our soul to receive it, even when our minds or our bodies are occupied elsewhere. “Come to me,” Jesus says to the weary and burdened, “and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”⁶

The Productivity and the Peace

I can hear what you’re thinking. You’re asking yourself the question that every parent has heard hundreds (thousands?) of times: *Wait, what?*

I know. I thought the same thing. How can Christ’s invitation to abide—to make us people of impact, to give us power and joy, to transform how we pray—*simultaneously* be an invitation to rest? Wait! What?

All I can say is, look at Moses.

When God told Moses to leave the wilderness and take the

What Is Abiding?

Israelites to the Promised Land—a job that would undoubtedly involve a lot of herding and hauling and walking and work—he gave him a twofold promise: “My Presence will go with you,” God said, “and I will give you rest.”⁷

Moses could work hard—*really* hard—but it wouldn’t be a frenzied or driven-to-succeed sort of work. Instead, moving all of those people and animals and possessions could be done while his soul stayed at rest. Why? Because God was with him.

And it’s the same thing for us.

When we choose to surrender to Jesus—putting down roots and living not so much in a *place* as in a *person*, making “the Most High your dwelling,” as the psalmist says⁸—the Holy Spirit moves into our lives. His presence goes with us. He turns our deepest thoughts toward God so that, whether we’re sitting in church, crafting a sales presentation, or loading groceries into the back of the car, our hearts and minds can enjoy perfect peace. The two things—the productivity and the peace—can happen at once.

My mother—the to-do list lady—understands this dynamic. When I told her I was trying to understand what abiding looks like in everyday life, she told me this story:

One Thanksgiving Day, before all the family arrived, I was stirring the gravy, mashing the potatoes, and cooking all the vegetables. I was whirling around between all the pots, trying not to let anything burn.

I looked out the door, and I saw my husband just sitting in a chair, reading his Bible. “Lord!” I said. “Look at me. I used to be a Mary. Now look at me. I’ve turned into a Martha! All I really want to do is to be with *you*, Lord!”

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Then, she says, she heard the Lord speak in his gentle whisper: “Where do you think you are right now?”

Right there by the stove, potato masher in hand, Mom had her answer: God knew her desire was to abide in him—and there he was, in her kitchen, abiding in her.

Abiding Transforms Our Prayer Life

Abiding, then, boils down to a willingness to surrender. It’s taking our everyday, ordinary, potato-mashing lives and placing them before God as an offering—not trying to live up to any sort of impossible standard, but simply trusting the Holy Spirit to change us, renew us, and keep us connected. “Embracing what God does for you,” Paul writes, “is the best thing you can do for him.”⁹

All of which has a transformational effect on the way we pray.

At its most basic level, prayer signals relationship; it’s the vehicle God invented to allow us to communicate with him. And when we take God up on his invitation—when we say yes to dwelling in Christ and to letting him dwell in us—our prayer life changes. No longer do we cultivate our own feelings and desires; rather, it is Christ who forms his thoughts, emotions, and purposes in us—and the more we allow this life-giving flow of his life into ours, the more powerful and effective our prayers become.

Scripture reinforces God’s desire for connection. God could, of course, do stuff on his own (heal this person here, make it rain there), and sometimes it seems like he does. Far more often, though, we see him *waiting* on people, *engaging* with people, getting to *know* people—and then meeting their needs—through their prayers.¹⁰

What Is Abiding?

(And if you only look up one endnote in this chapter, make it that one. Connecting with people—letting us know he sees us and knows us—is so important to God.)

In John 15:7, tucked into the very center of the call to abide, Jesus gives us one of the most jaw-dropping promises in all of Scripture. “If you remain in me,” he says, “and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” We’ll dig into this if-then dynamic in the next chapter; for now, though, consider the fact that, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we can begin to experience a deeper level of desire, one where our raw and unformed thoughts begin to reflect purposes that God wants to accomplish—*even if we’re not consciously aware that we are praying!*

Abiding in Christ sharpens our spiritual senses, equipping us to pray “without ceasing.”¹¹ In her book *Live a Praying Life*, Jennifer Kennedy Dean maintains that prayer is not something we start and then stop. It is a continual flow:

Your mind is an amazing creation. It functions efficiently on many levels at once . . . At one time you may be driving a car, remembering directions, carrying on a conversation, retaining a grocery list in your memory, observing the time, and on and on and on. And there are mental processes going on that you are not even aware of. Consider this: At one of those levels, prayer is always going on. This is true because the Spirit of Christ lives in you and He is always praying.

Sometimes, prayer is at the most conscious and aware level of thought. Other times it is down a level or two . . . The sweet aroma of prayer is always rising from my innermost being (and yours) before the throne.¹²

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Jennifer became a dear friend of mine before her death in 2019. Ever ready to apply her science-oriented brain to biblical concepts, she considered prayer to be “proof” of how much God loves us. Why else, she wondered, would he choose to work *with* us and *through* us instead of *around* us?

I remember Jennifer telling me that in Psalm 37:4 (“Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart”), the word *delight* comes from the Hebrew word *anog*, which means “soft” and “moldable.” When God has your heart, she said, he molds it and shapes it, giving us desires that we may not even be fully aware of.

“And then,” she said with a smile, “God says, ‘Yes.’”

Why Pray the Scriptures?

*“If you remain in me and my words remain in you,
ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”*

John 15:7

If you’ve been around the Bible for any length of time, you’ve probably noticed that you can read a passage and learn something one day, and then—a day, a week, or a year or more later—you can read it again and discover something entirely different.

That may have been what Jesus was talking about when he said, “Every student well-trained in God’s kingdom is like the owner of a general store who can put his hands on anything you need, old or new, exactly when you need it.” Put another way, the Bible is like a storeroom in which we find treasure that is both new and fresh and old and familiar.¹

All of which to say that, no matter whether this is your first attempt to dig into John 15 or you’ve read it a dozen times, there is gold in these hills. And I want you to picture the scene.

Jesus is with his disciples, his closest companions on earth. He has washed their feet, celebrated the Passover meal, and told them about the Holy Spirit and what he would do. He has much more to say—more than his friends can bear to hear at that point—and he knows his time is growing short.² He will, in fact, be arrested later that night.

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Jesus chooses his words carefully. “If you remain in me,” he says, “and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

To me, that’s remarkable. Not just because he says we can ask for whatever we want (we’ll get to that in a minute), but because, out of all the topics in the universe that Jesus could have covered, he chose to drill down on prayer.

Think about it. He’s with his inner circle—the guys he has chosen to follow him, to learn from him, and ultimately to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Jesus could have taught them how to preach a really good three-point sermon. He could have doubled down on what it took to heal people. He could have talked about turning water to wine or (in a nod to what was undoubtedly one of his most popular miracles) circled back to what it looked like to feed five thousand people from a single lunch box.

But no. Jesus doesn’t cover any of these “how-to” topics. Instead, he focuses on how abiding—how dwelling in him and letting his words dwell in us—can, and should, impact how we pray.

Jesus’ Model for Prayer

I don’t know about you, but I spent a lot of years thinking that prayer was basically a one-way conversation in which I’d ask God for what I thought would be good and then see what happened. If my relationships or my circumstances lined up with my requests, I would know that God said yes. And if not, he said no. I didn’t begrudge God when he turned me down (I knew verses like Isaiah 55:9, which explains that God’s ways and his thoughts are higher than ours), but I much preferred it when I’d put in a prayer and get the answer I wanted.

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I liked it when prayer worked like a vending machine.

But that's not how Jesus sees prayer. As we see in the Lord's Prayer, he puts *relationship* ahead of *results*. When Jesus tells us to call God "our Father," he invites us to experience a whole new level of access and intimacy. Now, in John 15, he calls us to come even closer. To *connect*.

Jesus' model for prayer is based on attachment. On abiding. On the idea that if we remain in him and allow his words to soak into our souls, we can pray with the full and wholehearted expectation that God will answer.

That's an incredible promise—but it's conditional.

I'm no math-brain, but I remember enough from my ninth-grade geometry class to know that in a conditional statement, the *if* clause causes the *then* clause to happen. We've already considered the first part of the promise and how abiding—remaining—in Christ allows the Holy Spirit to influence our desires. Our prayers are no longer just "our" prayers; rather, they are petitions that draw their inspiration from the heart of God.

The second condition—the part of John 15:7 where Jesus says "if my words remain in you"—works much like the first. In this case, though, the Bible—God's Word—actually *creates* our desires. The more we dig into Scripture, letting the words we read penetrate our thoughts and shape our perspective, the more our longings will start to reflect what God already wants to do.

The more our prayers will line up with his plans.

And the more we will position ourselves to be people of impact.

We see this dynamic played out over and over again in the pages of Scripture, in places like Psalm 1:1–3. "Blessed is the one . . . whose delight is in the law of the LORD [that is, in God's

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Word], and who meditates on his law day and night. That person,” the psalmist writes, “is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.” Soaking up God’s Word equips us to be fruit-bearing people.

Fruit, when it’s talked about in the Bible, is often an outward expression of an inward power. In Galatians 5:22, for example, Paul writes about the fruit of the Spirit—things like love, joy, peace, and gentleness—which are visible manifestations of an unseen inner power at work in our lives. In the John 15 passage, when Jesus invites us to ask for whatever we wish, he tells us why: “This,” he says, “is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”³

God wants us to bear fruit. *Much* fruit. And delighting in his Word—letting it dwell in us and give shape to our desires and requests—can open the door to a harvest of answered prayer that extends beyond anything we could have imagined.

Lay the Track Down

So what does it look like, in practical terms, to let the Bible shape our desires and requests? Here’s a simple example of how this can work.

As I write this, I’m working my way through the Gospels, using a Bible reading plan that lets me check off sections I’ve read every day. A few days ago, I came upon the story in Luke 5:1–11 where Jesus asks Simon to put his boat out from the shore so he could use it as a pulpit of sorts, since the crowd was pressing in on him. Simon was cleaning his nets at the time, but he complied.

But then after Jesus had finished teaching, he made a second

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request: “Push out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”

Simon was an experienced fisherman who had been up all night long. He had to have been tired. Discouraged, even. Had I been in Simon’s sandals, I might have balked.

But he doesn’t. Instead, Simon says this: “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

Because you say so.

Right there was the prayer prompt I needed. “Lord,” I prayed, “help me obey you, even when what you’re asking me to do doesn’t make sense. May I always be willing to let down my nets—to do what you want—simply because you say so.”

Had I been thinking about obedience when I opened my Bible that day? No. But just reading a handful of verses reminded me of how important it is to be ready and willing to do what God says. In Simon’s case, obedience led to an “above and beyond” blessing; he and his partners hauled in so many fish that both of their boats started to sink! Who knows what God might do in my life—and in your life—when we ask him to make us quick to obey?

We don’t know—we can’t know—the good thing God might have in store as we ground our prayers in his Word.

One year, for example, I decided to pray 2 Peter 1:2 on behalf of one of my dearest prayer partners. She is a woman whose zeal for life is almost unmatched—she lives big, you might say—and the word *abundance* in that verse caught my eye. “May grace and peace be hers in abundance,” I prayed over this friend, again and again. What I didn’t know—what I couldn’t have known—was that she would come up against some incredible challenges in

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her workplace that year, including rumors and lies that eventually led to her leaving her job. Had my friend not been thoroughly covered in God's grace and peace, the fear and anxiety that tried to capture her heart during that difficult season might have succeeded. As it was, she weathered a six-month-long storm and, when she came out of the darkness, she found herself in a new job, one far more fulfilling (and financially rewarding) than anything she could have imagined.

I was asking God for abundance. He was willing to provide that—and he did—but he knew my friend would need his grace and peace even more.

And here's the thing about praying the Scriptures. We don't do the blessing, the healing, the providing, the protecting. That's God's job. Our job is simply to be the conduit for his power. The *branch*, to use John 15 terminology, through which the sap can flow.

Watchman Nee, a Chinese Christian writer, put it like this: "Our prayers thus lay the track down which God's power can come. Like some mighty locomotive, his power is irresistible, but it cannot reach us without rails."⁴

Let's lay the track down.

God's Word Has Us Covered

Stories like the one about God providing grace and peace for my friend—long before she knew she'd be out of work for a while—should not come as a surprise. Ephesians 3:20 tells us that God is able to do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine." And when we pray prayers birthed out of time spent in Scripture—when Christ's words remain in us and animate our desires—we tap into a power that goes beyond what our minds can conceive.

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“My word,” God says in Isaiah 55:11, “will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

Likewise, in Jeremiah 1:12, God declares, “I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.”

And his word comes with clout. It’s like fire, God says, or like a hammer that breaks rocks in pieces.⁵ It’s what he used to create the whole world, for goodness’ sake! How much more can he use it to shape our lives?

Author Mark Batterson agrees that Scripture opens us up to an ongoing conversation with God. “The Bible,” he writes, “wasn’t meant to be *read through*; the Bible was meant to be *prayed through*. And if you pray through it, you’ll never run out of things to talk about.”⁶

He’s right. When we use Scripture as a launching pad for our prayers, we never run out of material. Our health, our friendships, our jobs, our families, our finances—all of these things (and so many more) are covered in the pages of the Bible. They matter to God! There is not a need we will face, a concern we will have, a relationship we’ll want to navigate, that God has not already thought of—and provided for—in his Word.

Effective time management? “Teach us to number our days, so we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (based on Psalm 90:12)

Dealing with things like worry and fear? “Don’t let us be anxious or afraid, but instead move us to cast all our anxiety on you, knowing that you care for us.” (based on 1 Peter 5:7)

Being kinder, or more bighearted, toward others? “Prompt us to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous and willing to share.” (based on 1 Timothy 6:18)

Those are just a few of the prayer prompts we find in the Bible;

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there are countless more to discover—prayer-shaping verses we'll unearth during our thirty-one days of abiding in the presence, provision, and power of God. And the best part?

The best part of the John 15:7 promise isn't just the fact that we can ask for whatever we want. The best part is that when we respond to Jesus' invitation—remaining in him, and letting his words remain in us—we get to live out John 15:8.

We bring glory to God.

We become productive, fruit-bearing people.

And we discover the security of knowing that we are Christ's disciples. That we are part of God's family. That we belong.

How to Use This Book

The word of God is living and active and full of power.

Hebrews 4:12 AMP

What do you want me to do for you?

Jesus posed the question twice in back-to-back conversations.¹ The first time, he was talking to James and John, two disciples (who were also brothers) who wanted to know if they could sit with Jesus—one on his right and one on his left—in his “glory.”

And then, just a few verses later, Jesus stopped when he heard the cries of a blind man. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked. “Rabbi,” the man answered, “I want to see.”²

Today, when we open our Bibles, we marvel at the chutzpah (and I’m pretty sure this word fits) the brothers displayed. To sit on each side of Jesus? Seriously? Who did these guys think they were?

The other disciples expressed their own indignation (maybe, I’ve wondered, because they didn’t think to ask first?), but Warren Wiersbe has a slightly different spin on their request. Given that Jesus had just been talking about his impending death, Wiersbe says it “took a great deal of faith” to ask what they did.³ James and John actually *believed* Jesus would rule a kingdom one day, and that they would (as he had promised) sit on one of twelve thrones.⁴ Still though. The brothers’ request was not about

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bringing God glory; it was a self-centered desire. Plus, Jesus said, they didn't know what they were asking. (Tuck that one away for a sec—we'll come back to it later.) He said no.

The blind guy though? He got what he wanted. He received his physical sight. Spiritually, he already had it; when he called Jesus "Rabbi," what he was really saying was *Rabboni*—which literally means "my Master."⁵ It was an expression of personal faith and connection. The blind beggar knew exactly who Jesus was—and upon receiving his healing, he followed him.

Let Scripture "Read" You

Looking at these back-to-back encounters with Jesus, I think both the brothers and the blind man met the "conditions" for prayer outlined in John 15:7. Clearly, each request sprung from a connection to Jesus (they each knew him as "Lord"), as well as a firm belief in his words (the brothers had internalized Jesus' kingdom promise; the blind man had heard enough of his teaching to know that Jesus had the power to heal). Where they diverged, perhaps, was in their motives. The brothers were after an important position; the blind man wanted to position himself to physically follow the man his spirit called Master.

I say "perhaps" because motives can be tricky. For instance, I may think I'm being selfless when I fix Robbie his favorite dinner, but because I know he'll appreciate it—he'll appreciate *me*—it's a win for me too. Only God knows what *really* drives us to do what we do. "All a person's ways seem pure to them," reads Proverbs 16:2, "but motives are weighed by the LORD."

Motives *are* tricky, and yet they play a key role in answered prayer. "When you ask, you do not receive," cautions James 4:3,

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“because you ask with wrong motives.” Is there a way we can be sure that when we pray, our motives are pleasing to God?

One litmus test is, of course, John 15:8—the follow-up to Jesus’ “ask me anything” offer. *Will our request bring God glory? Will it equip us to be fruitful? Is it the kind of thing that, when God answers, will show that we’re Christ’s disciples, that our lives are devoted to learning from him?*

A more broad-based test is the totality of the Bible. “All Scripture,” Paul writes, “is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.”⁶ When we read God’s Word—and allow it to “read” us—we can discover what pleases God and what doesn’t.

And Scripture, as we give it room to “abide” in our hearts and our minds, *does* inspect us. Hebrews 4:12 says God’s word is “active and alive,” and that it “judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” That’s the way the New International Version puts it; the New Living Translation is a bit more explicit. It says that the Bible “exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.” And the Amplified Bible puts it even more clearly:

For the word of God is living and active *and* full of power [making it operative, energizing, and effective]. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as the division of the soul and spirit [the completeness of a person], and of both joints and marrow [the deepest parts of our nature], exposing *and* judging the very thoughts and intentions of the heart.

“No other habit,” writes pastor Rick Warren, “can do more to transform your life and make you more like Jesus than daily

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reflection on Scripture.”⁷ It’s true: the more we reflect on the Bible—the more we allow it to shape our thoughts, our actions, our conversations, our prayers—the more the crooked or winding pathways of our motives will straighten themselves and begin to line up with what’s pure and right. The more our prayers will line up with God’s purposes.

Read, Reflect, and Respond

I’ve structured this book a little differently from previous titles in the *Praying the Scriptures* series. At the end of each chapter, instead of finding a collection of verses to pray, you’ll have an opportunity to *read* a few verses, *reflect* on how they intersect with your life, and then *respond* by praying the Scriptures.

For instance, in the chapter about dealing with worry, you’re invited to consider Psalm 46:10: “Be still, and know that I am God.”

We know this verse is not the only place in the Bible where God tells us to exchange worry for trust, to experience the comforting steadiness of his presence, and to enter into his peace. God does not want his children to be anxious, afraid, or stressed-out. But *reading* a verse like Psalm 46:10 and *reflecting* on it (and then praying it) are very different exercises.

Let’s give this a try so you can see how it works. Go ahead and read Psalm 46:10. Do it out loud if you can:

Be still, and know that I am God.

Now here’s how we might reflect on these words, praying them back to God:

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Heavenly Father,

*Help me be still. Let me get off the treadmill of worry,
busyness, confusion, and fear.*

Quiet my heart. Help me be still.

I want to know you are God.

I don't want to just hope this; I want to be certain of it.

Show me, Lord. Let me know you are God . . .

And then, as we continue to reflect on this little phrase, we may find ourselves saying:

*You are God. You are in control. You are the Lord of lords.
King of kings.*

*The Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting
Father, Prince of Peace.*

You are GOD.

See how that works? With just a few breaths born from a sentence that's a mere eight words long, we can move from striving to stillness, from panic to peace, from fearful to free as we pray!

You can take hold of a verse and do this at any moment—driving to work, standing in the grocery store checkout line, folding the umpteenth load of laundry that week. But I want to encourage you, if you don't do this already, to carve out a specific time and place to meet with God.

Weather permitting, I love to grab a mug of coffee, my Bible, and a journal and meet God in the early morning on my screened porch. Perhaps you've heard people talk about "thin places"—places where, almost from the moment you get there, you sense the line between heaven and earth start to dissolve. That's the

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screened porch for me. I get out there sometimes and God’s presence seems almost tangible. (I’d be lying if I didn’t admit I felt the air more than once, just to see.)

It’s not like this happens all the time. There are days when I’m out there with my Bible and the words feel more like ink on a page than they do like anything that might—to borrow John’s term—become “flesh.”⁸ Not only that, but we live in a Navy town, and there are plenty of mornings when the jet noise—the “sound of freedom” we’ve learned to live with and love—shatters the calm. Or when the dog’s tail connects with my coffee. Or when someone—my husband, a child, the pest control guy—pokes their head through the door and I find myself thinking about Susanna Wesley, a woman who birthed nineteen children (including Charles and John) and was known to pull her kitchen apron over her head as a signal to the kids that she was spending time with the Lord and should not be disturbed.

Maybe, I think on those days, what I really need isn’t so much a prayer journal but a nice full-body bib.

You get the idea. Whether it’s a screened porch, a park bench, or a special chair tucked in the corner of your bedroom, it can help to find a place that feels, for lack of any other word, a little bit *holy*. A place where the distractions of daily life don’t seem to press in quite so easily as they do elsewhere. A place where the muscle memory in your spirit can speak to your brain and say, “Shh . . . God is near.”

I envision the “Read, Reflect, Respond” section at the end of each chapter as a tool to enhance your own prayer time—your own conversations with God—but if you want to share your journey through these pages with a trusted prayer partner, or even a small group, be my guest. I recommend keeping a journal handy

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to record your insights and prayers, as well as God's answers, but I realize that not everyone is a "prayer journal person." (My husband, for instance, is not; I'm always amazed by his ability to recall thoughts, prayers, and entire conversations without taking a single note, while I struggle to remember what I had for breakfast, let alone what I was talking to God about last Tuesday.)

If that's how you're wired—if you're not a big writer—consider making notes in this book. If you pray a particular verse for yourself or a loved one, write the date in the margin, along with a word or two to help you remember what was going on when you prayed. That way, you can remember to thank God when he answers—and you'll have a record of his faithfulness. There's nothing like seeing God spur you to press in for an even deeper encounter with his power and his love.

One more to-do. If you find a verse that speaks with particular power to you, try to memorize it. Write it on an index card and take it with you, reviewing it again and again until it's as familiar as your home address. You won't always have this book or a Bible handy when a prayer need arises; the more biblical "capital" you stash in your memory bank, the easier it will be to make a withdrawal and the more strategic, and satisfying, your prayer life will become.

What Do You Want God to Do?

True confession: When my editor broached the idea of writing a book that would equip readers to pray God's Word over their lives, I balked. Like many Christians, I tend to feel selfish when I pray about personal needs; prayer feels better—holier, somehow—when it's done on behalf of other people. Praying the

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Scriptures for my life felt like navel-gazing. I don't want to look down; I want my gaze to be up.

But then God derailed that train of thought. He reminded me of how much I love it when my kids share their lives with me. When they ask my advice. When they seek comfort for some sadness or have some joy to share. My children are young adults now, and they tease me for saving the texts and photos they send. I can't help it though; I love conversations with them!

I think it's the same way with God. No detail of our lives is too large—or too small—to share with him. He loves when we seek his perspective. He longs to comfort us in our pain. He's plotted our victories since before time began; his heart sings when the ordained day arrives and they become real. Why wouldn't he want us to talk to him about all of this stuff?

Not only that, but after camping out in John 15 for the better part of two years—reading it again and again and again—I've come to realize that the whole reason God wants us to remain in him and let his words remain in us is to shape how we live. How we love. How we pray.

And speaking of how we pray . . .

Let me ask you a version of the same question Jesus asked James and John and then repeated when he heard the blind man shouting his name: *What do you want God to do in your life?*

Some of us may be navigating rocky places in marriage or needing God's provision in our job. Others may find themselves grappling with fear, worry, or grief—or having to wait on an answer to prayer that feels too long in coming. Maybe we're dealing with a relationship wound, a betrayal where extending forgiveness or being willing to love is something we just don't think we can do.

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Maybe we just need to know that we're loved and that who we are matters to God.

In the pages ahead, you'll find thirty-one different prayer concerns. Pray through them over thirty-one days or thirty-one weeks—or at whatever pace works for you. Approach them in order or poke around randomly, choosing the topics that color your life. And feel free—*please* feel free—to adapt any and all of these prayers so they become petitions not just for yourself but for the people you love.

And if you don't see a particular concern covered here, remember that there is not a single need you will face that God has not already thought of, and provided for, in his Word. Open your Bible—use a concordance if you need help finding particular words—and ask God to show you how to pray.

Because here's the thing. We are not praying alone. When we abide in Christ, we abide with his Spirit—and the Holy Spirit's job is to help us. We may not know what to pray for, but he does (even if it's something, Scripture says, that is too deep for words). And because of how well God knows our hearts and how well the Spirit knows God's heart, we can be certain that whatever the Holy Spirit prays for us will be good—and that it will line up perfectly with God's will.⁹

So don't worry about praying for the “wrong” thing. Trust the Spirit to lead you—and know that God won't turn you away, any more than he turned away James and John. He may just say no.

Which is okay.

I like how Tim Keller put it when he wrote about prayers that don't get answered the way we want them to. “We have the assurance that God, our heavenly Father, always wants the best for his children,” he writes. “God will either give us what we

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ask or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything he knew.”¹⁰

In the brothers’ case, Jesus declined their request for two reasons. One was that the celestial seating chart was not his to arrange; “These places,” he said, “belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”¹¹

As a mother who’s planned three big weddings, I find that Jesus’ explanation makes sense. The places of honor at these things are always reserved in advance; I can let that one slide off my back without thinking twice. It’s the other reason Jesus offers that tends to undo me.

“You don’t know what you are asking,” he says.¹²

James and John didn’t know it, but their desire to see Jesus come into his kingdom meant that he’d have to suffer and die. And when they told him, yes, they certainly could drink from the very cup he drank from, they could not have imagined what their own future held. James was the first of the disciples to be martyred, and John went through great persecution of his own.

How often have I been just like those young men, begging God to give me something he knew would lead me through pain? How often have I asked for something without seeing the bigger picture? How often have I been disappointed in God, hugging my trust tightly to my chest, the way I do with a coat when I feel the bite of the wind?

God has met me in those places more times than I care to remember. He sees my arms folding in—*I trusted you, God!*—and he opens his wide. “Jodie,” he whispers gently, “you didn’t trust me. You trusted in an outcome, in a gift. I don’t want you to want the gift. I want you to want me.”

I want you to want me.

How to Use This Book

I want you to be with me.

I want to be with you.

That's God's desire, spelled out over and over again in John 15 in his call to abide. And as we do—as we remain in him and open ourselves up to him through our prayers—he satisfies our hearts' deepest cry. We may start the prayer process desiring a gift or an outcome, but somewhere along the way, our hunger will grow. Our desire will shift. We'll move from seeking the gift to the place where we long for the Giver.

Whom have I in heaven but you?

And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail,

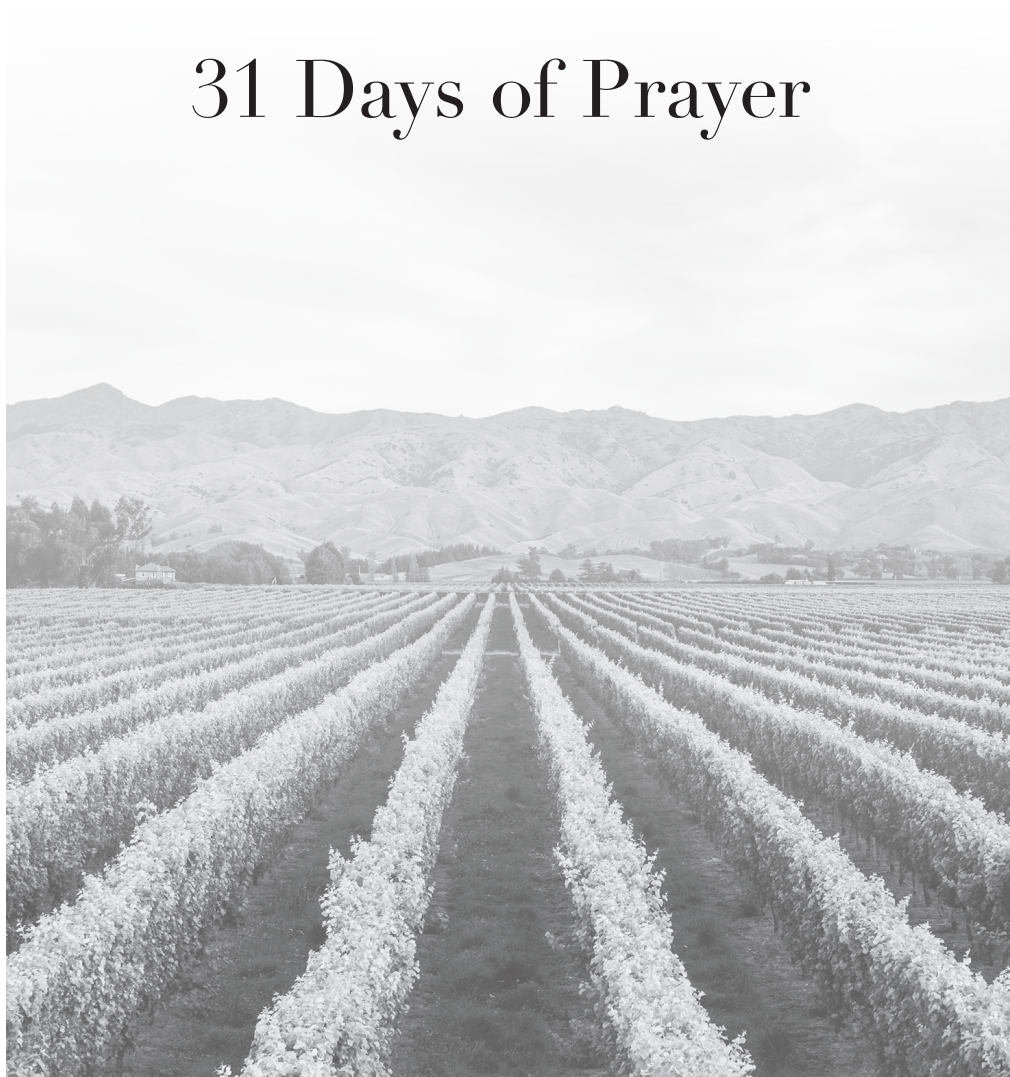
but God is the strength of my heart

and my portion forever.

Psalm 73:25-26

— Part 2 —

31 Days of Prayer



The Power of Connection

“I am the vine; you are the branches.”

John 15:5

People used to say my father and I favored each other.

They said I had my dad’s smile (which made me happy), as well as his nose (which made me less happy). We shared many of the same interests and skill sets, including the ability to play only mediocre tennis but get a varsity-level suntan if we parked ourselves in a beach chair for an hour. Dad loved comparing forearms at the end of the day to see who was darker—a contest that he always won.

For better or for worse, children are image bearers, a connection that reflects our relationship with our heavenly Father. Remember what God said when he was creating the world? “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.” And then, having created Adam and Eve, God gave them a job: “Be fruitful,” he said, “and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.”¹

I can’t help but think that Jesus had the creation story in mind as he issued a similar charge to his disciples. “I am the vine; you are the branches,” he said. “I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.”²

Just as we bear the image of the Creator, so a branch bears the

Praying the Scriptures for Your Life

image of the vine. And just as God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful, so Jesus says we've been chosen—appointed—to bear fruit.

I don't know about you, but I find these twin fruit-bearing assignments, one from Genesis and the other from John, as intimidating as they are inspiring. I love the grand vision—the idea that we are in a living relationship with the Creator who intends for us to impact the earth—but I wonder how we are supposed to go about doing the job. What role can I play? What role can you? Can we really be difference makers in the world?

Thank goodness for Andrew Murray, who explains how the vine-branch union works in the fruit-bearing process.

“Without the vine,” Murray writes, “the branch can do nothing.”

As branches, we get that. We know we need the vine to nourish us and equip us to produce fruit. We know we need God.

But there's a flip side, Murray says, to the fruit-bearing process: “Without the branch the vine can also do nothing.” He goes on:

A vine without branches can bear no fruit. No less indispensable than the vine to the branch, is the branch to the vine. Such is the wonderful condescension of the grace of Jesus, that just as His people are dependent on Him, He has made Himself dependent on them. Without His disciples He cannot dispense His blessing to the world.³

It's okay. I'll wait while you read that one again. (I had to.)

What Murray is saying, in a nutshell, is this: Without the disciples—without us—God cannot provide good things for people.

That's . . . astounding.

God could have chosen to work around us (or even in spite of us), but he didn't. He chose to work in us and through us to bless

The Power of Connection

other people. God chose us—his image bearers—to reflect his love and be the channel through which his power is unleashed in our world. And the way this works—the way we open the chute for God’s power and provision—is through our prayers.

We see the link between prayer and provision played out over and over again in the Bible. God gave the barren Hannah a son, provided rain for Elijah, opened Peter’s prison doors, and added fifteen years to King Hezekiah’s life.⁴ God moves when his people pray. And when Jesus tells us to “ask,” it’s not just an invitation. It’s a command: “Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit.”⁵

When we pray, we bring glory to God. He wants us to plow the field with our prayers so that he can provide an incredible harvest.

And all I can think, as I consider how a mighty God could entrust us with such a high calling, is that it is because of how much he loves us. Not because we are clever or well-behaved or (thank goodness!) athletic, but simply because he is our *Father*—the Father who loves us and longs, as Jesus reminds us, to “give good gifts to those who ask him.”⁶

My earthly father died, way too young, from brain cancer. As I look back on his legacy—on all the ways his life left an imprint on mine—the gift I cherish the most is the introduction he gave me to Jesus. Dad came home one day when I was just eight years old and confessed that he’d had it all wrong. He had spent his life trying to earn God’s approval (teaching Sunday school, working hard at his job, playing second-rate tennis with a big grin on his face) until someone told him it wasn’t about being a “good guy.” Being a Christian was about realizing you were *not* good, after all, and that you needed a Savior.

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All of which made complete sense to me. Even as a child, I knew I was a sinner. The idea that God's grace could cover my failings came then, as it does now, as a major relief—and I was only too glad to (as John 1:12 puts it) receive Jesus, believe in his name, and receive the right to become a child of God.

And today, as I slip my hand into my heavenly Father's and consider the fruit he has already produced and the harvest yet to come, I am reminded of the blessing, and the privilege, that comes with being an image bearer.

I am reminded of the blessing, and the privilege, of prayer.

Read _____

- See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1)

- “This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples . . . You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.” (John 15:8, 16)

- We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10 NLT)

Reflect _____

- God created you with a longing to live a life of purpose and impact. He has put desires in your heart that he wants to satisfy in

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above-and-beyond ways. And as you receive him and believe in him, he calls you his child. You are his masterpiece.

➤ Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to the work God wants you to do, the prayers he wants you to pray. Where do you long to see fruit in your life? How might your prayers in this area bring glory to God? What, if anything, is holding you back from asking “big”?

➤ Allow yourself to envision your life as a vine-branch union with Christ, one that brings glory to God, produces much fruit, and marks you as one of his own. Surrender any thoughts or fears (*I'm not good enough . . . I don't pray very well . . . I already have too much on my plate*) that may keep you from flourishing in your role as a fruit bearer. Rest secure in God's presence today, knowing you are extravagantly, lavishly loved.

Respond _____

Heavenly Father . . .

➤ *Thank you for creating me in your image. I receive you and believe in you; thank you for welcoming me as your child. (John 1:12)*

➤ *Give me the power to understand how wide and long and high and deep your love is, and fill me to the measure of all your fullness. (Ephesians 3:18-19)*

➤ *May I gradually become brighter and more beautiful as you enter my life and make me more like Jesus. (2 Corinthians 3:18 MSG)*

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- *Teach me to pray. (Luke 11:1)*

- *May my prayers bring you glory, bear lasting fruit, and mark me as one of your disciples. (John 15:7-8)*

- *You created me in Christ Jesus to do good works. Show me how to pray about _____ so the good things you have planned will come to fruition. (Ephesians 2:10)*

- *When I feel weak or ill-equipped, remind me that your grace is sufficient and your power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9)*

- *Thank you for choosing me and appointing me to bear fruit. Teach me to focus my efforts, and my prayers, on fruit that will last. (John 15:16)*

- *No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Keep me attached to you. (John 15:5)*

- *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made . . . All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:14-16)*

- *When I am anxious or uncertain, remind me that nothing can separate me from your love. (Romans 8:39)*

- *You live among us, Lord. Take delight in me; calm all my fears; rejoice over me with joyful songs. (Zephaniah 3:17 NLT)*

The True Purpose of Prayer

“This is to my Father’s glory . . .”

John 15:8

When I was growing up, my family spent two weeks every summer at a Christian camp that catered to families and singles of all ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds. It didn’t matter what denomination you came from, or whether you liked traditional or contemporary worship; we were united by a love of Scripture, a belief in the power of the Holy Spirit, and a desire to draw closer to Jesus.

I remember the older woman who came every year from someplace in New Jersey. If you asked her what time it was, she never looked at her watch. Instead, her face would light up and she’d say, “It’s time to praise the Lord!”

At the time, I thought she was a little bit crazy. I mean, I usually *did* want to know what time it was so I wouldn’t be late for lunch, arts and crafts, or the goofy worship-slash-exercise class held outside on the lawn, called *Devotion in Motion*. Sometimes, though, I didn’t really care what time it was. Sometimes I just wanted to hear her say it:

It’s time to praise the Lord!

Praying the Scriptures for Your Life

The phrase seemed funny then, coming at random intervals and when there didn't seem to be any *reason* for praise. As I've gotten older, though, I've begun to realize that old gal was onto something. It's *always* a good time to praise God—particularly when you may otherwise feel discouraged, anxious, or weak.

Which happens, right? There are plenty of times when we may not *feel* like giving God praise, times when grief, disappointment, worry, or even just plain old fatigue fills the radar screen of our emotions. But as my friend Sara Hagerty says, that's actually the *best* time to adore. "Adoration," she writes, "never requires us to shut down our emotions. On the contrary, it invites us to bring them—*all* of them—to God. God does not want our polished pretenses . . . He wants us to come honestly. So He invites us to wrestle."¹

And as we wrestle—as we show up and (as Sara puts it) "sing your way into the truth"—something happens. The very act of praising (even when we don't feel like it in the midst of our pain) releases the power of God into our lives.

Fern Nichols, founder of Moms in Prayer International, understands this transformation. Praise, she writes, "changes our attitude; brings an awareness of God's presence; defeats Satan; releases God's power; brings a victorious perspective; provides peace; wards off the spirits of self-pity, depression, and discouragement; and produces strength in an anxious heart."²

In short, praise opens the door to hope.

When we look at our lives through the lens of God's character, everything shifts. Problems that once loomed impossibly large start to shrink. Everything finds its place in light of God's attributes: his perfect *holiness* reveals our flaws; his *mercy* allows us to confess them; his *faithfulness* emboldens us to come before him with our every need . . . which sets the stage for his glory.

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When we call on God, releasing his power through our prayers and our praise, our lives become places where he can perform. Our careers, our marriages, our finances, our friendships, our health—all of these venues, and more—are opportunities for God to showcase his splendor. That’s what Jesus is talking about in John 15:7–8 when he tells us to “ask.” “This is to my Father’s glory,” he says, “that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

“The true purpose of prayer,” writes R. A. Torrey, “is that God may be glorified in the answer.”³

How fitting it is, then, for us to *begin* our petitions with that *end* in mind. How natural it is for us to come before God—to enter his courts—with praise.⁴ And how comforting it is to know that there is not a single need we will face that God is not able, through his very nature, to address. When we are weak, he is strong. When we are uncertain, he is omniscient. When we need guidance, he is wise. When we know we’ve blown it, he is redemption and grace.

In the prayer prompts to follow, you’ll find a collection of concerns—places where we need God to show up in the face of things like anxiety, loneliness, and grief—and Scriptures that reveal his presence there. If you don’t see your particular need in the mix, try working your way through the psalms. You’ll discover a God who is sovereign, powerful, omnipresent, faithful, full of wisdom, and more. Or use the alphabet as a praise prompt, thinking of words—*Awesome, Beautiful, Counselor*—that describe who God is. (I like to do this when worry and fear try to keep me awake during the night. I start naming God’s names—and I’m usually asleep again before I get beyond G or H!)

God longs to reveal himself—his character, his attributes,

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his nature—to us. Our struggles are his entry points, places where we can witness his goodness, his comfort, his power. “Call on me when you are in trouble,” he says, “and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory.”⁵

And you will give me glory. In other words, it doesn’t matter where we are or what sort of trouble we face. My little old camp friend was right: it’s always time to praise the Lord.

Read _____

➤ Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. (Psalm 100:4-5)

➤ Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

➤ Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. (Psalm 8:2)

Reflect _____

➤ God wants to satisfy us with his presence. He longs to show us his goodness and let us know how much we are loved. As C. S. Lewis put it, “It is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His

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presence to men . . . In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.”⁶

➤ What has been your experience with praise? Do you hold back, wondering, as Lewis once did, why an Almighty God would need, or crave, our worship “like a vain woman wanting compliments”?⁷ Do you wait to praise until you have a reason to rejoice? Or are you comfortable with the idea of “wrestling” in praise, worshiping God even in the midst of doubt, worry, or pain?

➤ Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into praise. Read the psalms; sing an old hymn or a new chorus; let your adoration spill onto the pages of a prayer journal, along with your questions or pain. God welcomes it all. “Come near to me,” he says, “and I will come near to you.”⁸ Open your heart and enjoy God today.

Respond _____

Heavenly Father . . .

➤ *You are my PROTECTOR. You are a SHIELD to those who put their trust in you. (Proverbs 30:5)*

➤ *You are WISE. Your UNDERSTANDING has no limit. (Psalm 147:5)*

➤ *You are ALL-POWERFUL. You have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. (Jeremiah 32:17)*

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- *You are a FAITHFUL FRIEND. You will never leave me or forsake me. (Hebrews 13:5)*

- *You are my COMFORT. You bind up the brokenhearted and comfort all who mourn, giving us the oil of joy and a garment of praise in place of the spirit of despair. (Isaiah 61:1-3)*

- *You are my GUIDE. You will guide me along the best pathway for my life. You will advise me and watch over me. (Psalm 32:8 NLT)*

- *You KNOW me. You know everything about me. You know my thoughts; you know everything I do; you know what I'm going to say even before I say it. You place your hand of blessing on my head. (Psalm 139:1-5 NLT)*

- *You are the God of HOPE. When I am weary or discouraged, you fill me with all joy and peace as I trust in you so that I will overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)*

- *You are my HEALER, physically and emotionally. You forgive all my sins and heal all my diseases. You heal my broken heart and bind up my wounds. (Psalm 103:2-3; 147:3)*

- *Whatever I need, you are ABLE to bless me abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that I need, I will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:8)*

- *You are MERCIFUL. Because of your great love I am not consumed, for your compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23)*

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- *You are my STRENGTH. I do not need to be fearful or dismayed because you have promised to strengthen me and help me; you will uphold me with your righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)*


- *You are TRUSTWORTHY. You are my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in you, and you help me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise you. (Psalm 28:7)*


- *You are my HELPER in my weakness. Even when I do not know how to pray, your Holy Spirit intercedes for me. (Romans 8:26)*

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