

Welcome to Prayer Week 2018

This is our second year of devoting the first week of the year to focused prayer. My hope is that this continues to grow into a regular and refreshing part of our life together as a church.

In the pages that follow you will find a daily guide to help you in your prayer times. As you begin, here are a few things to keep in mind.

Take heart. Prayer is hard.

There are so many voices clamoring for our attention that we actually choose to ignore God's voice most of the time. One comforting thought is that prayer has never been particularly easy, even in less distracted ages than ours. Yet, the hardest work is often the work most worth doing. So, when you sit down to pray, be ready for opposition from within and without. To defend against this, take some pointers from Jesus' own practice (Mark 1:35):

- Find some **quiet time**.
Jesus had a full schedule. His "busy" was better than my "busy." Yet, He also knew that prayer was the real work, so He prayed when He wouldn't be disturbed.
- Find some **quiet space**.
Jesus didn't expect to have a good conversation with God at Starbucks. He went to a "desolate place" – no WiFi, no Facebook, you get the picture. You don't have to hike into the wilderness in order to pray, but you will find prayer greatly helped if you can find a place to block out the other voices.

Take note. Prayer starts with listening.

We've all been here: "Every time I pray, I pray for the same things! And it gets old!" We usually think of prayer as us asking God for things, but that's only part of it. Our prayers should actually be the fruit growing out of our time in the Bible. Basically, we speak to God *after* He has spoken to us through His word.

As you read each of the passages in this guide, use the questions listed with them to help you listen to God and then lead you into prayer. Make a point to do this whenever you study God's word, and my guess is your prayers will mature along with your knowledge and love of God.¹

After you've meditated on and prayed through a verse or passage of Scripture, move on to your own free prayer.

I've included a passage for morning prayer and a psalm for evening prayer. It was commonplace in previous ages to begin and end the day with focused prayer, and this is a good practice for us to revive. If you like, use the morning prayer for worship, prayers for yourself and intercession for others. Then use the evening prayer for confession, thanksgiving and intercession.

Don't be discouraged if praying twice a day seems like a tall order, or if some of the questions seem over your head. The schedule and questions are not a rule, but a tool. Use them to help you start praying and see how God grows you in this area of your life.

¹ The questions themselves come from *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* by Tim Keller. Keller gets his material from older pastor-theologians like Martin Luther and John Owen.

New Year

O LORD, length of days does not profit me
except the days are passed in thy presence,
in thy service, to thy glory.

Give me a grace that precedes, follows, guides,
sustains, sanctifies, aids every hour,
that I may not be one moment apart from thee,
but may rely on thy Spirit
to supply every thought,
speak in every word,
direct every step,
prosper every work,
build up every mote of faith,
and give me a desire
to show forth thy praise;
testify thy love,
advance thy kingdom.

I launch my bark on the unknown waters
of this year,
with thee, O Father, as my harbour,
thee, O Son, at my helm,
thee, O Holy Spirit, filling my sails.

Guide me to heaven with my loins girt,
my lamp burning,
my ear open to thy calls,
my heart full of love,
my soul free.

Give me thy grace to sanctify me,
thy comforts to cheer,
thy wisdom to teach,
thy right hand to guide,
thy counsel to instruct,
thy law to judge,
thy presence to stabilize.

May thy fear be my awe,
thy triumphs my joy.²

² The Valley of Vision, 206-207 (Banner of Truth Trust)

January 1 - Morning

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Matthew 6:9-13

Jesus said, "Pray then like this:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil."

To help you meditate on the passage, write down answers to the following questions:

- What does this text show me about God for which I should praise or thank him?

- What does the text show me about my sin that I should confess and repent of? What false attitudes, behaviour, emotions, or idols come alive in me whenever I forget this truth?

- What does the text show me about a need that I have? What do I need to do or become in light of this? How shall I petition God for it?

- How is Jesus Christ or the grace that I have in him crucial to helping me overcome the sin I have confessed or to answering the need I have?

- How would this change my life if I took it seriously; if this truth were fully alive and effective in my inward being? Also, why might God be showing this to me now? What is going on in my life that he would be bringing this to my attention today?

Pray through these meditations, and then move on to praying for your needs and other pressing concerns.

Evening

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Read Psalm 95

Turn the Psalm, or a portion of it, into a prayer and pray it back to God.

- Think over your day and confess where you sinned or failed to respond as you should have.
- Think over your day and pray for people you met or heard about who have needs or are in difficulty.
- Pray for some of the more urgent and important needs on your heart.

January 2 – Morning

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Ephesians 2:1–10

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

To help you meditate on the passage, write down answers to the following questions:

- What does this text show me about God for which I should praise or thank him?

- What does the text show me about my sin that I should confess and repent of? What false attitudes, behaviour, emotions, or idols come alive in me whenever I forget this truth?

- What does the text show me about a need that I have? What do I need to do or become in light of this? How shall I petition God for it?

- How is Jesus Christ or the grace that I have in him crucial to helping me overcome the sin I have confessed or to answering the need I have?

- How would this change my life if I took it seriously; if this truth were fully alive and effective in my inward being? Also, why might God be showing this to me now? What is going on in my life that he would be bringing this to my attention today?

Pray through these meditations, and then move on to praying for your needs and other pressing concerns.

Evening

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Read Psalm 2

Turn the Psalm, or a portion of it, into a prayer and pray it back to God. Specifically, think about how this psalm points forward to Jesus and what this means for you and for others.

- Think over your day and confess where you sinned or failed to respond as you should have.
- Think over your day and pray for people you met or heard about who have needs or are in difficulty.
- Pray for some of the more urgent and important needs on your heart.

January 3 - Morning

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Proverbs 3:5-10

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones.

Honor the LORD with your wealth
and with the firstfruits of all your produce;
then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with wine.”

To help you meditate on the passage, write down answers to the following questions:

- What does this text show me about God for which I should praise or thank him?

- What does the text show me about my sin that I should confess and repent of? What false attitudes, behaviour, emotions, or idols come alive in me whenever I forget this truth?

- What does the text show me about a need that I have? What do I need to do or become in light of this? How shall I petition God for it?

- How is Jesus Christ or the grace that I have in him crucial to helping me overcome the sin I have confessed or to answering the need I have?

- How would this change my life if I took it seriously; if this truth were fully alive and effective in my inward being? Also, why might God be showing this to me now? What is going on in my life that he would be bringing this to my attention today?

Pray through these meditations, and then move on to praying for your needs and other pressing concerns.

Evening

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Read Psalm 51

Turn the Psalm, or a portion of it, into a prayer and pray it back to God.

- Think over your day and confess where you sinned or failed to respond as you should have.
- Think over your day and pray for people you met or heard about who have needs or are in difficulty.
- Pray for some of the more urgent and important needs on your heart.

January 4 - Morning

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Philippians 1:3-11

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

To help you meditate on the passage, write down answers to the following questions:

- What does this text show me about God for which I should praise or thank him?

- What does the text show me about my sin that I should confess and repent of? What false attitudes, behaviour, emotions, or idols come alive in me whenever I forget this truth?

- What does the text show me about a need that I have? What do I need to do or become in light of this? How shall I petition God for it?

- How is Jesus Christ or the grace that I have in him crucial to helping me overcome the sin I have confessed or to answering the need I have?

- How would this change my life if I took it seriously; if this truth were fully alive and effective in my inward being? Also, why might God be showing this to me now? What is going on in my life that he would be bringing this to my attention today?

Pray through these meditations, and then move on to praying for your needs and other pressing concerns.

Evening

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Read Psalm 130

Turn the Psalm, or a portion of it, into a prayer and pray it back to God.

- Think over your day and confess where you sinned or failed to respond as you should have.
- Think over your day and pray for people you met or heard about who have needs or are in difficulty.
- Pray for some of the more urgent and important needs on your heart.

January 5 - Morning

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Philippians 2:1-11

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

To help you meditate on the passage, write down answers to the following questions:

- What does this text show me about God for which I should praise or thank him?

- What does the text show me about my sin that I should confess and repent of? What false attitudes, behaviour, emotions, or idols come alive in me whenever I forget this truth?

- What does the text show me about a need that I have? What do I need to do or become in light of this? How shall I petition God for it?

- How is Jesus Christ or the grace that I have in him crucial to helping me overcome the sin I have confessed or to answering the need I have?

- How would this change my life if I took it seriously; if this truth were fully alive and effective in my inward being? Also, why might God be showing this to me now? What is going on in my life that he would be bringing this to my attention today?

Pray through these meditations, and then move on to praying for your needs and other pressing concerns.

Evening

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Read Psalm 42

Turn the Psalm, or a portion of it, into a prayer and pray it back to God.

- Think over your day and confess where you sinned or failed to respond as you should have.
- Think over your day and pray for people you met or heard about who have needs or are in difficulty.
- Pray for some of the more urgent and important needs on your heart.

January 6 - Morning

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Colossians 3:1-17

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

To help you meditate on the passage, write down answers to the following questions:

- What does this text show me about God for which I should praise or thank him?

- What does the text show me about my sin that I should confess and repent of? What false attitudes, behaviour, emotions, or idols come alive in me whenever I forget this truth?

- What does the text show me about a need that I have? What do I need to do or become in light of this? How shall I petition God for it?

- How is Jesus Christ or the grace that I have in him crucial to helping me overcome the sin I have confessed or to answering the need I have?

- How would this change my life if I took it seriously; if this truth were fully alive and effective in my inward being? Also, why might God be showing this to me now? What is going on in my life that he would be bringing this to my attention today?

Pray through these meditations, and then move on to praying for your needs and other pressing concerns.

Evening

Approaching God: Ask him for his presence and help as you read and pray.

Read Psalm 23

Turn the Psalm, or a portion of it, into a prayer and pray it back to God.

- Think over your day and confess where you sinned or failed to respond as you should have.
- Think over your day and pray for people you met or heard about who have needs or are in difficulty.
- Pray for some of the more urgent and important needs on your heart.

Good Resources on Prayer:

The Valley of Vision.

A fantastic collection of prayers from different Puritan authors. Order a copy or read it online at <https://banneroftruth.org/us/devotional-series/the-valley-of-vision-devotional/>

“Does Prayer Change Things?” R.C. Sproul

A mini-book on prayer, available at the church or online for free at <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/rc-sprouls-crucial-questions-ebooks-now-free/>

Prayer Power Unlimited. J. Oswald Sanders.

Short chapters with rich material

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God. Timothy Keller.

A longer read and slow-going on the front end, but it gets better the further you get through the book.