



Prayer.

Series Journal

We must alter our lives in order to alter our hearts, for it is impossible to live one way and pray another.

- William Law

This guide is meant to help you do what you wish you could do better. Pray.

It's not exhaustive. It won't necessarily make all your spiritual lights go on. And it certainly doesn't answer questions and/or do much "work" for you. Rather, it's a tool for you to use. As you dedicate the next 5 weeks to God, utilize this guide to help you begin to pattern yourself in prayer.

May God change you deeply as you pursue Him in prayer in the days (and years) to come.



Week
One

The book of Genesis begins by visualizing how things were meant to be. God created men and women- human beings, to be connected relationally with each other and in much the same way, with Himself.

After sin enters the scene, Genesis 3 says

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Soon after this, they are banished from the garden and the idyllic picture of God's creation is now full of fractures.

As a consequence of rebellion and a strong desire to be our own boss (god)...what was once intimate is now fractured. Therefore, what was meant to be plain has been replaced, for now, by the mystery of prayer. In other words, the difficulty you have with prayer stems much from the fact that it's not "natural". It's the necessary reality for a soul torn in some measure, from its God, to commune with Him.

Take this moment to think on this, and then, acknowledge the hunger for God that you have, or even want to have, to Him. Perhaps it's simply the desire to be aware of His presence. Celebrate this desire, and thank God for it. This pang of hunger is the soil in which a life of prayer begins.

By Genesis 4, a total breakdown is beginning. Interestingly, Genesis chapter 4 ends with this phrase:

“At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.”

Humanity was beginning to cry out to a God that wasn't as accessible as their broken hearts felt, deep down, He ought to be. Something was wrong. “God...hear us!”

The disciples of Jesus, many centuries later, came from a tradition of “calling on the name of the LORD.” Yet, they ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. They needed help.

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Our Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:1-4)

Jesus gives a helpful structure. Use this structure and its generalities, and pray specifically about your life. Start with God and reflect on who He is. Ask Him for what you need and want. Confess, with no fine sounding filters, your sin. Forgive others, by name, that have wronged you. Then, ask God for His help and protection.

You may be finding distraction and unbridled thoughts your worst enemy as you try to pray. Don't worry, it's totally normal. Praying out loud, if even in a whisper is very helpful. Keeping a journal to write is a critical tool for the most active minds. Using the structure of the Lord's Prayer, as well as others, also helps center your thoughts. Bear in mind, though, that much about prayer is a discipline, so don't get discouraged. Allow God to begin shaping your heart and prayers over the days and weeks ahead.

“ ‘Our Father, Who is 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. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil’ ”

Rewrite this prayer below, as it applies to your day:

By now, you may be wondering if this is going to “take.”

You may or may not feel any differently. You may feel frustrated.

Below, write out a prayer to God asking Him to reveal the thoughts, behaviors and mind-set that are perhaps serving as obstacles to you in prayer.

Expect answers. Write down any specifics that you feel God may be highlighting that aren't serving your desire to grow in prayer.

If you feel like you are growing to some degree, spend some time thanking God and asking Him to reveal what the next steps in your growth will look like. Be willing to move forward, based on what he reveals today.

Begin with the "Lord's Prayer" in your own words. Take your time, and remember that you are speaking to God, not reciting a script.

Read Psalm 84.

Spend some time silently reflecting on how you can step into more discipline today, making your desire for increased moment to moment communion with God your pursuit. How can you take one step today into creating as much desire for prayerful connection and awareness of the Father as most of us do meals, phone calls and favorite TV shows? Let God reveal it to you, then act on it.

On day 7 of week 3, you and everyone else on this prayer journey will be invited to fast. A fast is a period of abstaining. This fast will be the forgoing of eating food. If you have a medical condition that makes 24 hours without eating a bad idea- pick something else that you crave (media, speaking...be creative) and refrain from it.

Week 1

Day 6

I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had absolutely no other place to go.

- Abraham Lincoln

Turn in the Bible to Psalm 86, verses 1-13. As you read through it, restate this prayer to God in your own words. You may want to capture it below.

You may find yourself at a point where you are questioning the validity of what you are doing. Maybe the novelty is gone, and this effort seems to have worn out its welcome.

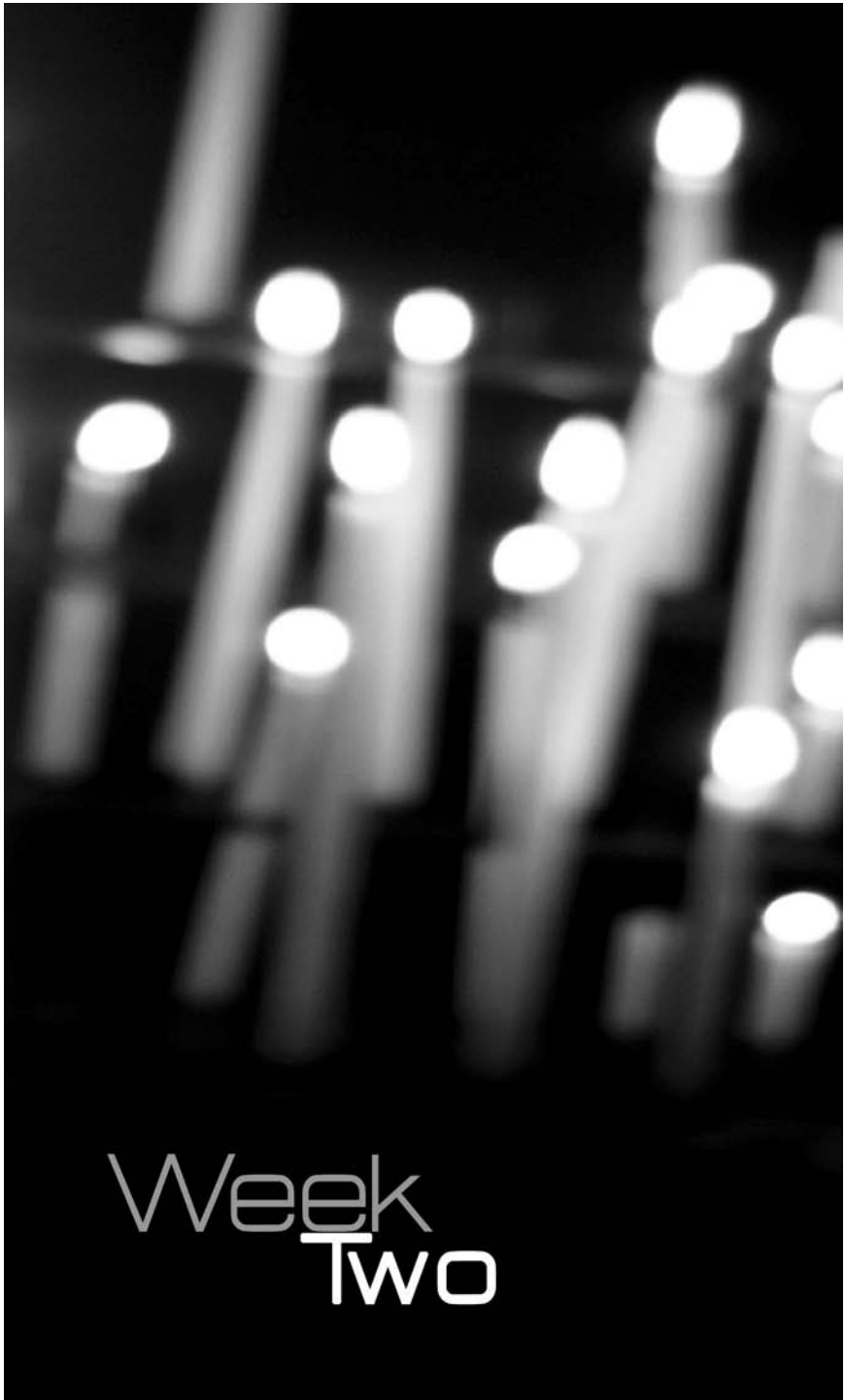
You doubt the substance of prayer, and perhaps even the closeness of Christ.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

- Matthew 28:16-20

Note that some worshiped, while others doubted. Some resurrected, miraculous Jesus... two different categories of faith. And yet Jesus invites them all. He charges them all. He promised His closeness to all.

Spend a few moments and thank God for His invitation that comes long before you merit it. Carry with you today the hope that comes from worshipping a God that knows what you actually believe and isn't threatened by it. He still invites you to journey with Him.



I must secure more time for private devotions. I have been living far too public for me. The shortening of devotions starves the soul, it grows lean and faint. I have been keeping too late hours.

-William Wilberforce

If someone were to make a documentary about your life, how would they describe your relationship with God and your quest for spiritual depth?

As you begin to orient more of your heart and your thoughts and your schedule around the quiet pursuit of Christ, more of your plans, relationships, and attitudes will be transformed.

Spend some time reading Romans 12:1-8. Some of what Paul is explaining is immediately obvious. Other parts will take some reflection. Turn your thoughts toward God, and use this passage, sentence by sentence, as a way of praying over the transformation God wants to produce in you. Let the words of your prayer be shaped by what Paul is saying in the text, and allow God to illuminate areas of your life and thinking that need metamorphosis.

Write here the 3 things you sense God may want to help you overhaul.

“Be confessing to one another the trespasses, and be praying for one another, that you may be healed; very strong is a working request of a righteous man”

- James 5:16 Young’s Literal Translation

If the future is not fixed, but is open for God and those who partner with Him, how does that affect today?

Take a few moments to quiet your mind.

Then, in your own words, believing that God’s people can actually affect the present and future possibilities by their prayers and their actions:

Pray for the personal details of your life.

Pray over Crosspointe.

Pray over the Greater Raleigh area.

Pray over our nation and the people.

Pray over specific parts of the world with relation to needs and violence and people’s lack of knowledge about the true ways of Christ.

Go into your day expecting to be part of what you prayed.

Go into your day expecting that God is not just observing, but at work.

Today has never happened before. Ever.
It is full of possibilities and potential.

Some things you can influence and control.
Most things you cannot.

God is inviting you, wherever you are in this journey of faith, to step into this day as though it has the potential to be eternally significant; for you and for those you encounter.

Pray right now that God would help you see each conversation, each exchange, each deal, each interaction with family and friends, each plan - according to His dream for the world. Pray that you would, today more than ever before, sense the Spirit of Christ.

You may want to use the space below to write down the names, issues, encounters and circumstances that you predict will shape your day, as a way of helping you pray intently.

Yesterday you may have stepped out of your intellectual comfort zone and prayed for things that put you at risk for disappointment, embarrassment, or a total spiritual overhaul.

Spend a few minutes expressing to God these same things, again. As you pray, acknowledge the hurdles that you have in your mind, what you can act on to make parts of your request take flight, and what you would be willing to say looks like evidence that God is at work in your prayers.

After a few moments, write the names of people you trust, and pray over them in detail.

Now email them the seemingly impossible thing you are praying about. Invite them to pray with you. Invite them to ask about it. Admit your fears and doubts. Admit your hopes.

Week 2

Day 5

Read Psalm 5:1-3

Think back on your week, reflecting on what you have learned and thought thus far.

Be bold enough (faithful enough?) to list your requests and wonder and hope below. And then set your heart on being expectant. Refuse your mind skepticisms. Expect God to respond.

Look back at what you write in a few days, and see if you can discern anything God has done in what you requested of Him.

Looking ahead.

You'll be invited to fast in week 3. Be watching for that.

Say to God, in whatever words you choose, exactly what you feel, or even want to feel, about Him. Then, if you can, narrow it to a shortened, simple phrase and repeat it throughout your day.

**Rich is the person who has a praying friend.
- Janice Hughes**

Earlier this week, you took time to pray not only for your own world, but for others and their world. The “why” of prayer has part of its answer in that it trains a naturally self-inclined heart towards others.

Draw concentric circles below, 3 or 4 lines, so that you have what looks like a target. As you pray, you may see yourself as the inside circle. And then the next outer circle may be your family, then work, etc. You may require more circles. As you pray for others, do the same for them. Put them in the center circle, and as you pray through their concentric circles of interest, you will be praying for their whole life, and therefore, really “praying for them.” Tell them later today.



Week
Three

And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

- 1 Kings 19:9-12

Sit quietly for 5 minutes and refuse to think of tasks and that which you are responsible to produce.

Then begin, if even like a child, giving all your worries, distractions and preoccupations to your Father in heaven. Because not only are they weighing you down, they are drowning out the whisper.

Perhaps a symbolic way to do it is to write them down, and then drop this booklet on the floor as a way of showing that you do not hold them anymore, and that you will not be governed by them.

“Speak only if what you are going to say is more beautiful than silence” - Anonymous

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak.... James 1:19

How much of the distracting noise in your life, the noise that helps drown out the whisper of God’s voice, is actually coming out of your mouth?

Our culture does not teach us much about disciplining our tongues. Quite the opposite.

Ask God to quiet you today. Ask Him to reveal ways that He has been trying to get through to you through others, even others than you don’t like listening to. Listen for His whisper in the mouths of others today. And speak only if your words are better than silence.

Repeat this phrase from Psalm 19 through the day:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

What you began yesterday will take a long time to really take root. Today, like yesterday (and throughout the rest of this week) intentionally listen for God's whisper:

In the words of family and co-workers.

In the Scriptures.

In what we might call "recurring themes" and "sacred echoes."

Write here what you think you may already be hearing, or sacred echoes that you may be recognizing.

"The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

- John 10:3-5

Quiet yourself. Shut down the noise of your mind as well as the noise of your environment.

In the rhythm of natural breathing, slowly and intently, pray in a whisper this phrase:

Inhale: Lord, my God..."

Exhale: "Show me your will.."

As you continue, you may change the exhaled portion of the prayer to things like "have mercy on me". "Help me recognize your voice", etc...

Take time here and there during this exercise to write down key thoughts that you believe may be God trying to show you what matters to Him.

Tomorrow, many in our community will be fasting from food for 24 hours. The following day, it's recommended that you end the fast with at least one other person. Celebrations and deeply significant experiences should always be enjoyed with others. You may want to arrange for that today.

If you are sick, fast and pray; if the language is hard to learn, fast and pray; if the people will not hear you, fast and pray, if you have nothing to eat, fast and pray.

- Frederick Franson

Today you are fasting. If you have breakfast, then not eating until breakfast tomorrow would be 24 hours. You may consider last night's dinner the beginning as well.

Today, let your physical hunger remind you of your weakness, as well as the needs of others. At the same time, let that hunger, and your mind's constant wondering about "how much longer" fuel your intensity to be disciplined enough to hear from God. Let it be a reminder of your developing hunger for things far better than your next meal.

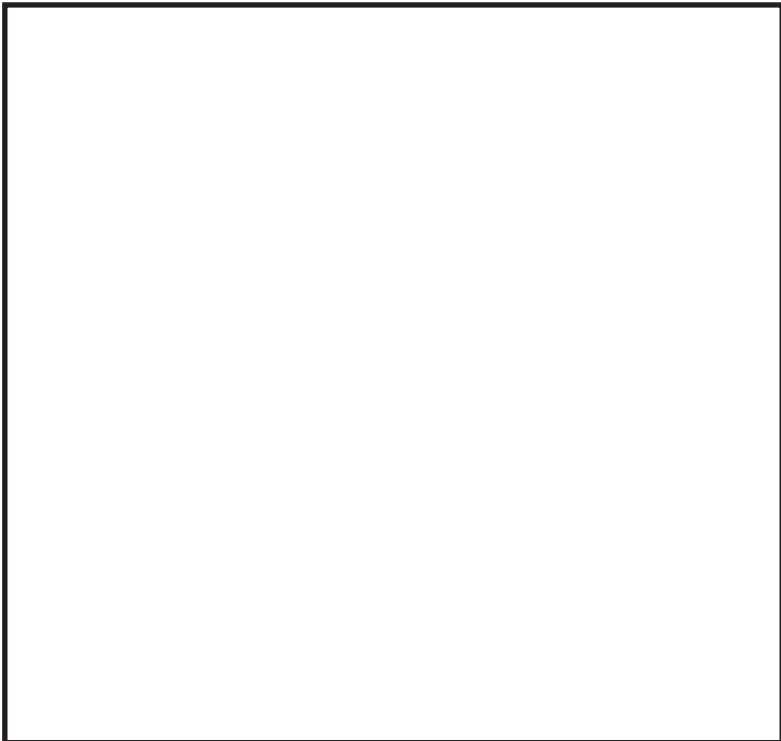
Learn today about what appetites rule you and how your craving for Jesus compares. Let your intermittent discomfort remind you of how blessed we are, and how those blessings can be a distraction when we forget their Source.

Today, your life is a prayer.

You are breaking the fast today with others on the journey.

Discuss with them what you're learning and what you are hung up on.

Then, pray for each other. One thing. Each of you write your one thing in another's box.

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for participants to write their one thing for prayer.

From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

- Acts 17:26-27

Surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

- Matthew 28:20

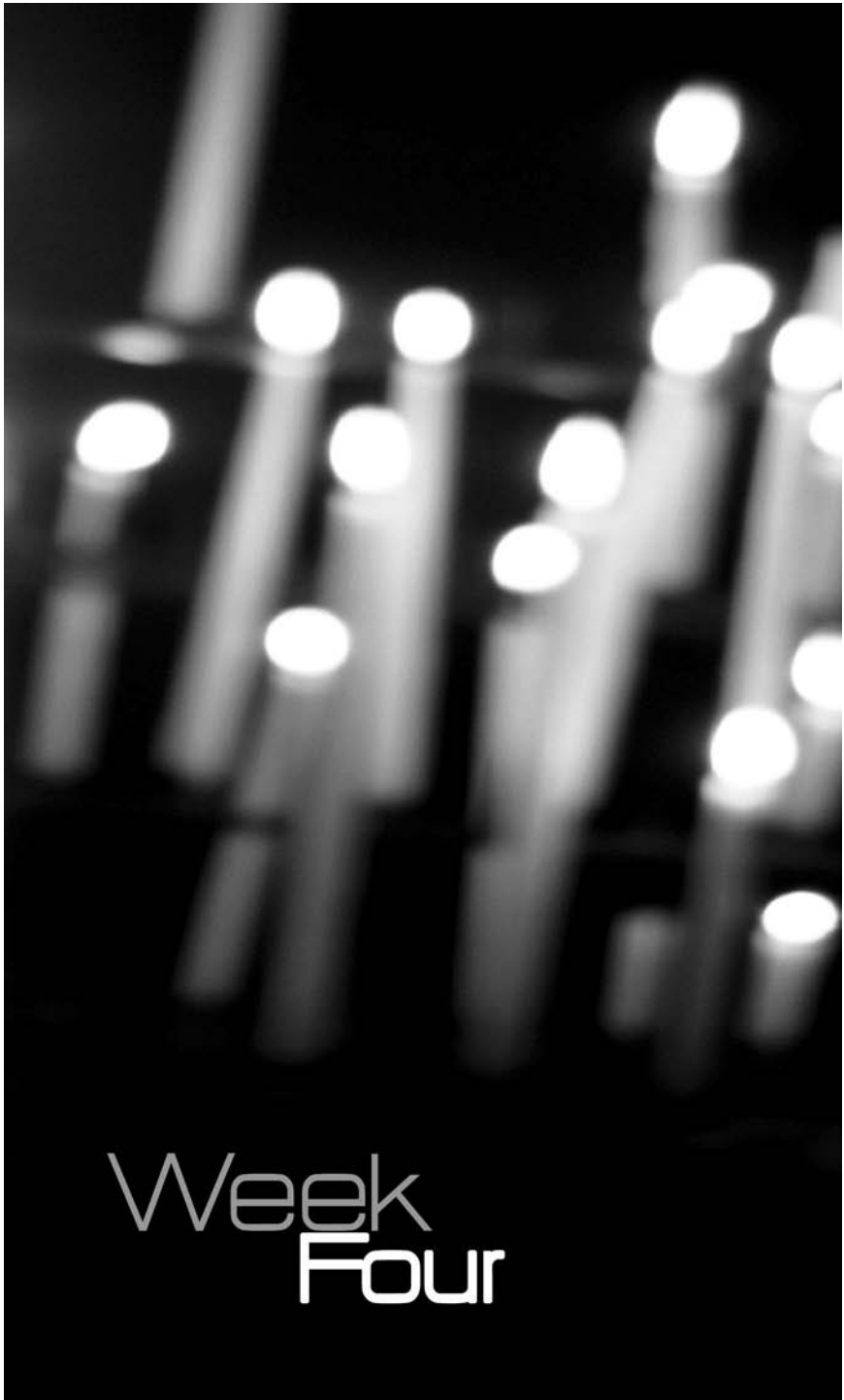
Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go...

- Joshua 1:9

What is the next step for you in living and enjoying these realities? What must shift in your life to move toward God, and farther away from that which drowns out the whisper?

God will tell you. God will walk with you. Will you take steps today to begin reorienting your life around seeking the voice and the will of God, and to entrust the impossible to Him?

Ask God to tell you these things today. Do not decide ahead of time how and when He will tell you. In constant prayer, remain aware.



Week
Four

Week 4

Day 1

Read Psalm 86

Finish this, writing with as much detail as you can stand...

"God, today I am grateful for the breath in my lungs, my home,
my clothes,

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer... Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. ... Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

- Psalm 32

So often, unconfessed sins feel like weight. They come between us and others, and even between us and our ability to enjoy the presence of God.

Ask God now for forgiveness for specific sins in your life. Ask Him to reveal what amends look like. And then experience the joy that comes with trusting God enough to receive His freeing forgiveness in Christ, and to actually go face reality, and be part of how things get set right.

Read Mark 11:20-25

So far this week, you have been exploring gratitude and confession in prayer. This daily exercise in humbling the heart keeps us in a good place, and serves in part to remove the “barriers” and silence we often experience in our journey with God.

Today, you will pray something unreasonable.

You have, perhaps, already decided what God can do, will do, cares about or involves Himself in. You’ve drawn lines. But, today, you will erase the boundaries you have approved for God and pray the impossible. What’s the thing that’s so big that to tell others you prayed for it borders on embarrassing? Pray for that. Intently.

Ask for it with all the confidence you can muster in our Creator. Thank Him. Confess to Him. Listen to Him. And then ask for the impossible.

Pick 4 things.

People you know and love. Perhaps an “enemy.” A relationship that’s on the rocks. Something going on in the world. Something wonderful. Something terrible. Pray over these 4 things with as much focus and awareness on the Spirit of Christ as you can—asking God what he needs to change in you. Present to God your desired outcome and meditate on whether this outcome aligns with His character. Give it a significant amount of time, and focus only on these four things.

You may want to begin as the Lord’s prayer does, appreciating the wonder and goodness of God as you recognize it (“our Father in heaven, hallowed/sacred/incomparable is your Name and character..”), and meditating on just Who it is your bringing these 4 things to.

And then, throughout the day, every time they come to mind - verbalize these things to God in prayer.

Read Acts 2:36-42
Read Romans 12:9-21

Tucked into the markers of what it looks like to be a Jesus-follower, is prayer. The picture is always of one having their attitudes and behaviors transformed. A renewing.

Go back through these lists and ask God to help you in each item listed. For example, ask God to not only “give you peace,” but to illuminate the areas where you lack peace, and how you can bring peace into your home and workplace.

You’re asking God to shape you into the Biblical picture of being Christ-centered. This is much of what it means to pray “In Jesus’ name.”

Week 4

Day 6

Knowing that God is reading, write an honest question. Express a doubt. A fear. A regret. A hurt. Be specific. Communicate an actual desire.

Then listen.

Then, in the peace that comes with knowing you've been heard, live today ready to act.

Read Colossians 1:1-14

Go back through verses 9-14, and line by line, let Paul's prayer for his brothers and sisters be your prayer for your journey.

You may then wish to go back again and pray this same prayer for a few others that come to mind. Something like, "God, would you fill _____ with the knowledge of your will today. Would you grant _____ spiritual wisdom and understanding so that he/she will walk in a manner worthy of you....."

Repeat this at lunch.

on break.

at dinner.

before bed.



Week
Five

Take off your watch, hide the clock, and in a still, quiet place, tell God what you feel like you are learning. What you are hoping. What you are struggling with in any area of your life.

Read Mark 9:14-24

In prayer, celebrate all that seems to be coming into view as you discipline yourself to seek God out.

Celebrate the fact that what you still don't have down to a science doesn't threaten or worry God. Your Father wants this FOR you, not just FROM you.

Celebrate Christ and His desire to help you grow.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

- Luke 18:9-14

This text from Luke birthed what is now an ancient prayer called the *Jesus* prayer. It is not a brow-beating. It's the humble repositioning of the heart we all need.

Spend some time today praying this prayer, allowing God to reveal to you any area where you lack a spirit of humility and gratitude. Take this prayer into your day, allowing God to use it as a reminder of your dependence on Him.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner;"

Read Mark 9:2-8

God desires to bring us to a clearer and more intentional focus on Jesus Christ. Beyond all religion, all doubts, all academics and all debate....Jesus.

Ask God that He would help you recognize the presence of the Spirit of Christ saturating your day.

Pray that God would help you live out this Spirit of Christ.

You may want to repeat this prayer, or one similar, to God throughout the day:

“When I look around, may I see nothing but Jesus. When people see me, may they see no one but Jesus.”

One can believe intellectually in the efficacy of prayer and never do any praying.

- Catherine Marshall

Last week on Day 3, you prayed for something seemingly too huge to be considered rational.

Do it again.

Take time to thank God for anything you consider as evidence that God has begun to put things in place to make it happen.

If you don't see any evidence, perhaps you would dare to ask God, "Why?" and listen for an answer today.

Read Luke 11:1-13

How long, O LORD ? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.

- Psalm 13

No matter the day, the LORD has been, in fact, good.

In prayer, reflect on everything in your world that can only be attributed to infinite goodness.

Should you be having one of those days where this doesn't seem possible, email a friend or two right now and ask them to point out the good things in your life. You may, to stay ahead of the game, do this recognition of goodness in others before they ask you to.

Quiet yourself before God, praying thoughtfully about whatever comes to mind. Your posture may be kneeling, sitting, standing, pacing, laying face down, etc...

Pray, using the thoughts and images that come to mind. Use the busyness of your mind to guide you. As the to-do lists encroach, and the distracting rapid-fire images come, use them for your time of peaceful prayer. You may find your thoughts floating to family, your friends and co-workers, Crosspointe, local and global issues. They are no longer distractions, but ideas to turn into sincere requests for God's guidance and involvement. In between thoughts and prayers, listen for God's prompting to move on or to think and pray more deeply about something that's come to mind.

Week 5

Day 7

Pray.
Listen.
Do.
Repeat.

**The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make
his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.
The LORD turn his face toward you and give
you peace.**

- Numbers 6:24-26

Resource List:

Hearing God
- Dallas Willard

Prayer
- Philip Yancey

Prayer, Finding the Heart's True Home
- Richard Foster









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