

THE 28-DAY

Prayer

JOURNEY

A DAILY GUIDE TO
CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

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 ZONDERVAN
BOOKS

For my cousin Clarise

*When I think of the powerful prayers our grandmother Eleen
and our aunt Elizabeth prayed for all of us, I think of you.*

*Your commitment to prioritizing prayer
reminds me to do the same.*

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INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I decided to put together a 28-Day Prayer Challenge on Instagram. I'd been feeling guilty about my lack of consistent and fervent prayer, so I figured I'd commit to providing twenty-eight days' worth of prayer prompts to hold me accountable to pray and to encourage others to do the same.

While I knew the basic format for prayer, as Jesus modeled in Matthew 6 (what we commonly call The Lord's Prayer), I made up the content, one day at a time, throughout the challenge. As I paused to think about what I needed to talk to God about, I shared those thoughts with others and encouraged them to do the same.

I honestly didn't think I'd finish.

I was afraid I'd fall off the wagon and fail myself and everyone doing it with me.

But I didn't. I finished the challenge and invigorated my prayer life by doing so.

Praying intentionally—bit by bit, day by day—made the idea of regular, consistent prayer much less formidable. I did it because one day at a time seemed *doable*.

This book is born of that challenge and is written with the same goal in mind. I want you to commit to prayer, but I also want you to view this commitment as *doable*.

And if you skip a day (or a few days), that's okay! Lord knows I

have done the same. But don't give up. Pick up where you left off. Ignore the day of the week if you have to and just pray. Keep going. Perfection is not required. Simply show up to talk to God knowing that He wants to talk to you.

This book gives you three prompts a day—morning, afternoon, and evening. The first four days of the week, we'll cover the basic tenets of prayer:

1. Monday: **Praise** and Thanksgiving (offering gratitude to God)
2. Tuesday: **Repent** (seeking forgiveness from God)
3. Wednesday: **Ask** (presenting your requests to God)
4. Thursday: **Yield** (surrendering to God)

While we'll be praying for others throughout the week, during the last three days we'll be more intentional about moving outside of ourselves and toward our families, friends, community, and world.

5. Friday: Family and friends
6. Saturday: Saturday challenge
7. Sunday: Sabbath prayers

As you pray, I will gently lead you through each tenet so that you can understand and think deeply about it. Then, slowly but surely, we'll put it all together.

The goal is for you to keep this little book with you for twenty-eight days. Glance at it three times a day so that you are prompted to talk to God every morning, afternoon, and evening.

If you think you might forget, try doing it every time you eat. Grabbing a bite? Open up the book. Or try setting an alarm on your watch or phone (but don't dismiss the reminder until you've picked up the book!).

After making this twenty-eight-day journey twice, I know one thing for sure: slow and steady wins the race. This method will help you form new habits if you'll commit to it, little by little, one day at a time, for the next four weeks.

If you want to learn more about having a dynamic connection with God through prayer, I encourage you to check out the video curriculum and study guide for *The 28-Day Prayer Journey*. These complementary materials are a perfect way to learn more about the powerful impact talking to God can have on your life. To get all the details and help for using the study along with the book or for studying with a friend or your small group, go to:

www.ChrystalEvansHurst.com/pray

My prayer is that God will become more real to you than ever before as you spend time abiding with Him.

It's possible. How do I know? Because it's happened for me.

Week 1

DAY 1 • *Monday*

PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

*Today we are praising and thanking God
for His spiritual work in our hearts.*

MORNING MEDITATION

Sometimes when we go to God in prayer, we do it with a big laundry list of what we want God to do for us! (Not me, of course. Other people.) And thankfully, God is gracious to hear and receive our prayers for what we need and want.

But the first day of our prayer journey, and the first day of each prayer week, is dedicated to praising and thanking God. When we praise God, we adore Him for who He is. When we thank God, we express our gratitude for what He has done. Rather than beginning with ourselves, our prayers of praise begin with God. If God never did another thing for us, these are the reasons we would still love, admire, and honor Him.

Here's the real deal: when you praise God, you don't need a bunch of religious fanfare. Just tell Him what you think about Him that's good. Compliment Him like you would compliment a friend. Seriously, it's as simple as taking a moment—any moment during your day—and telling God what you know to be true about Him.

And thanking God is pretty simple too.

Do you remember a few years back when it became “the thing” to keep a gratitude journal? Perhaps you’ve already discovered for yourself how powerful it can be to choose gratitude every day. Research has demonstrated that we can transform our attitudes—toward God, toward others, and even toward ourselves—when we practice gratitude. When we slow down to pay attention to our lives—spiritually, physically, relationally—we notice all that God has provided for us. And we have the opportunity to give God thanks.

Today, we’re going to thank God for what He has done for us spiritually. And over the next several weeks, we’ll thank God for what we’ve been given physically and socially. We’ll even thank God for the challenges we face. (Stay tuned to learn more!) This morning, thank God for all that He has done, spiritually, in *you*. (Later on today, you’ll pray for others.)

PRAYER PROMPT

Dear God, thank You for my salvation and my life with You.

- If you can recall the particular moment of your salvation, give God thanks for all that led you to that moment.
- If God gave you a family—parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles—who nourished your faith as a child, thank God for each of them.
- If your spirit was nurtured in a community of faith, give God thanks for all those in Christ’s body who cared for you and loved you to faith in Jesus.

This morning, give God thanks for your relationship with Him through Jesus.

AFTERNOON REFLECTION

Today you're thanking God for all that He's done for you and others spiritually. This morning you thanked God for your salvation, and this afternoon I want you to thank God for what He's done in the lives of others: loving and redeeming and guiding them.

One of the people whose faith I thank God for is my mom. Her faithful walk with Jesus not only shaped me but also formed faith in my sister and my brothers. As we watched her depend on God—in good times and in trying times—we learned what it looks like to trust God and walk with Him. God used my mother's spiritual life in our lives, and in the lives of so many others, and so I thank God for her faith in Him.

- Maybe you had grandparents or parents whose faith was a solid rock for your family. Thank God for their faith.
- Maybe you had a sibling or some other peer who shepherded you by taking you to youth group or summer camp, where you met Jesus. Thank God for their faith.
- Maybe there's a pastor or other spiritual leader who invested in you and brought you near to God. Thank God for their faith.
- Maybe you see faith forming in the life of your child, a niece or nephew, or another young person. Thank God for their faith.

This afternoon, give God thanks for His grace in calling others to Himself.

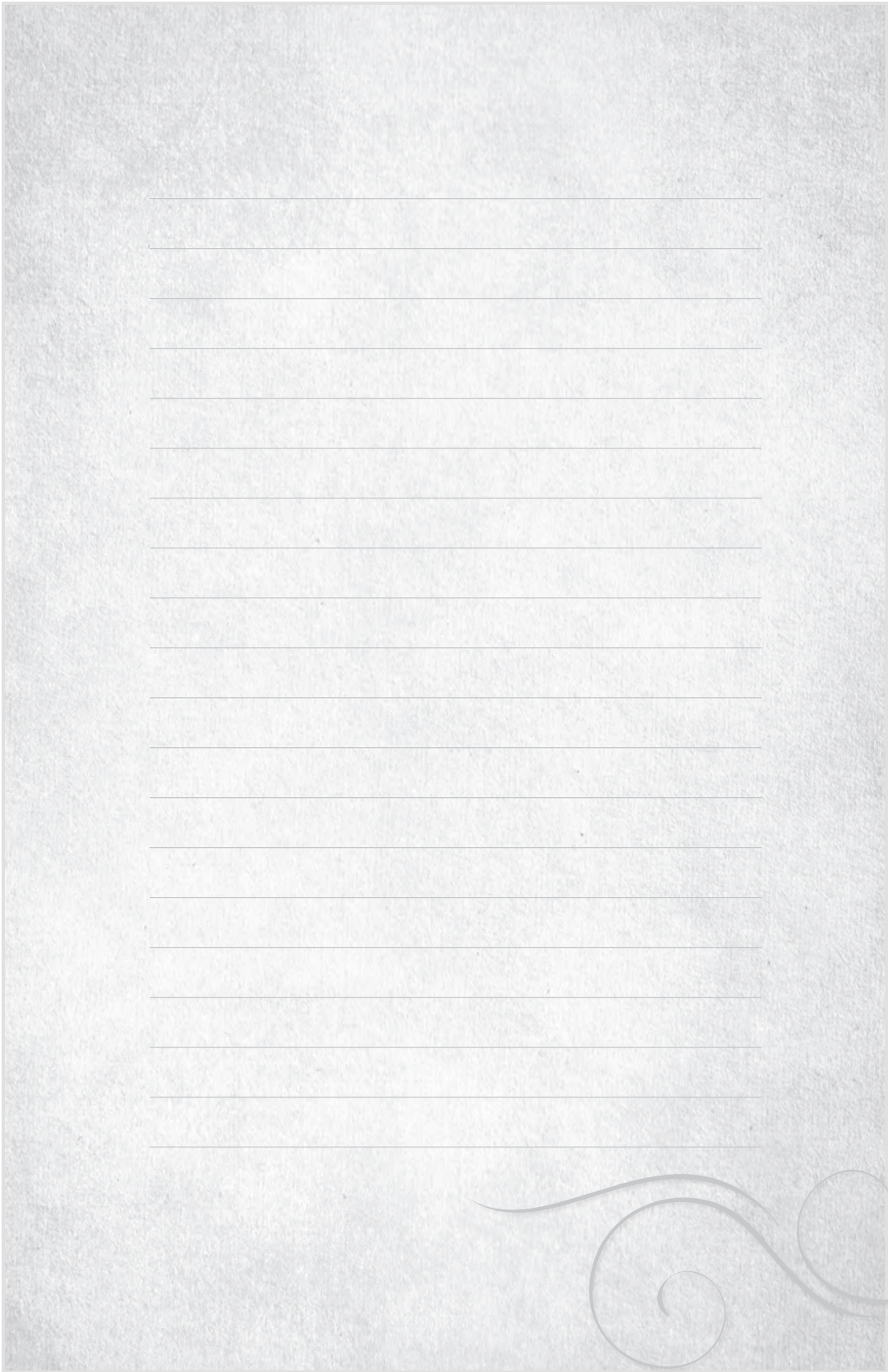
EVENING INSPIRATION

In his letter to the Romans, Paul addresses the hope of believers. They've received spiritual salvation, but they're waiting for the

redemption of their *bodies*. He explains, “But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently” (Rom. 8:24–25).

Isn't the same true as we hope for the salvation of loved ones who don't yet know Christ? With confidence in God, we wait for what we don't yet see. Maybe it's the salvation of an older relative who's close to death. Or maybe we've prayed for years that a dear friend would come to know the Lord. Or maybe you're the parent of a wayward child, and you're praying for God to take hold of his life or her life in a powerful way.

Tonight, thank God for what you don't yet see! Offer Him the ones you love who don't yet know Him, and thank Him in advance for their salvation.



DAY 2 · *Tuesday*

REPENT

*Today we are considering the gift of
God's invitation to repent.*

MORNING MEDITATION

Repentance. To be honest, this is the part of prayer I really don't like. It's the part where I examine my heart to notice my thoughts, my actions, and areas of my life where I am not pleasing God. And when the Spirit reveals them, I have the opportunity to seek God's forgiveness.

So there is beauty in repentance! By asking for forgiveness when I have offended God, hurt others, or harmed myself, I clear the way for Him to work more deeply and fully in my life.

Take a moment to ask God where you are not in right standing with Him. Don't rush through it. Ask Him to show you where there is a disconnect between what He wants for you and how you are living. Then sit for a few minutes to listen to Him. You'll be surprised by what He wants to say to you when you give Him a few minutes to talk.

If you are so led, share your areas of struggle on the blank page at the end of this day's prayers. Want to go a step farther? Confess your area of struggle to a friend during a visit or a phone call or even in a text or an email. Ask your friend to hold you accountable over the next seven days to consistently please God in that area of your life. Your bravery to acknowledge your sin to another might even help them do the same.

AFTERNOON REFLECTION

Search me, O God, and know my heart;

test me and know my anxious thoughts.

Point out anything in me that offends you,

and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

—Psalm 139:23–24 NLT

The reason sin is so destructive is that—in addition to harming us—it offends God and it also hurts others. This morning we talked about how confessing our sins to God helps *us* find freedom. Our honesty with God is the key that unlocks our ability to walk in the fullness of who we really are and who God wants us to be. And this afternoon, we’re considering the ways that our sin offends God.

Sometimes the enemy can twist our thinking to make us believe that as long as no one gets hurt, anything goes. Whether it’s our sexual behavior, harmful habits, or any other sinful behaviors, we want to believe that sin isn’t a big deal. If we convince ourselves that no one’s getting hurt, we can make excuses, justifying our sin instead of dealing with it.

But Psalm 139 reminds us that all sin offends God.

Is there a sin in your life that offends God? Ask God’s Spirit to reveal it to you. Pause for a “heart check.” Is your life pleasing God today?

PRAYER PROMPT

Dear God, I don’t want to hurt You with my thoughts or actions. I’m sorry for _____.

Stop here and there throughout the day to check in with God. Ask Him how you can please Him, and ask His forgiveness where you have not. Repentance is not so much about finding fault as it is about finding freedom—freedom to walk in honesty with a God who loves you dearly and wants the best for you.

If it helps you, take some notes about what the Spirit is showing you. If you can, share with a friend some of the thoughts you write down. Your honesty with God, whether or not you share with a friend, allows you to talk to Him with a clear conscience, knowing that you have acknowledged your areas of weakness and sought His help.

EVENING INSPIRATION

This morning we looked at how we find freedom when we confess our sins. And this afternoon we considered the ways our sin offends God. This evening, ask God to help you notice the ways your sin hurts others.

- Does your temper hurt the people with whom you do life?
- Does your addiction or habit waste time, money, or energy that could bless others?
- Does your behavior toward others set a poor example for those who are watching your life?
- How else does your sin affect others? Ask God to show you.

Here's the good news: God's mercy is bigger than any of your mistakes. It's not too late to talk to God and clear the air. You'll be glad you did.

And what if today wasn't a good day? What if you know you have blown it in some way?

Well, guess what? He knew you would need His help. That's exactly why He came.

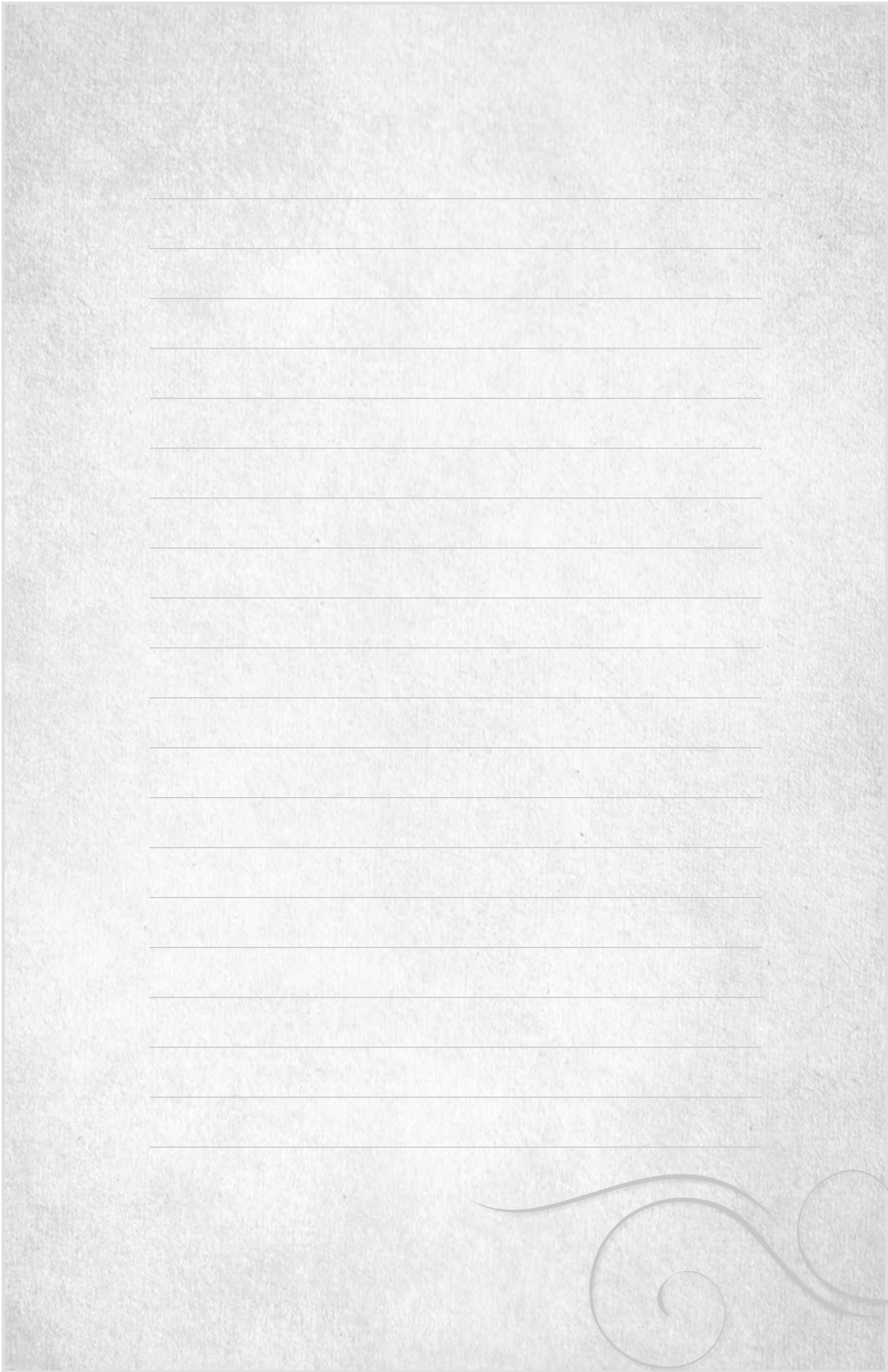
“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

—*Luke 5:31–32*

Don't be ashamed to tell Him that you need Him. He's listening.

Do you need Jesus today? Tell Him so.

If today was a day of victory for you, tell Him that too.



DAY 3 · *Wednesday*

ASK

*Today we are expressing our confidence that
God sees and hears us when we pray.*

MORNING MEDITATION

This is the day that you have been waiting for, right? The day you get to present your *requests* to God! So don't be shy: talk to God about all of it. Often. As soon as a need, a concern, a decision, an emotion, or a hard circumstance arises, let it remind you to chat with Him. You are not bothering Him. He likes to hear from you.

This morning, what request are you champing at the bit to ask of God? No need to fake the funk and request what you *ought* to pray for. Think of something you really *want* to pray for. He knows your heart anyway, right?

This morning, pray for the desires of your heart.

Start today by being honest. What do you desire most from God for yourself?

- A home that you can own?
- Healing of a disease that's impacting your health?
- A partner with whom to share your life?
- A job that will allow you to provide for your family?

Share your big heart's desire on the blank page at the end of this day's prayers. Doing so creates a great opportunity for a heart check in the future. When you return to this book during a new season of life, you will see whether the desire of your heart has remained steadfast or if it has changed.

Pick at least one thing—the thing your heart burns for—and go for it.

Pause. Be still. Lay it at Jesus' feet and just ask.

Know that when you pray, God hears more than you say, answers more than you ask, and gives more than you imagine in His time and in His way.

AFTERNOON REFLECTION

This morning you let it all hang out by asking God for what you most want. God loves it when you trust Him with what's in your heart. This afternoon, ask God for what you *need*.

Often there will be overlap between what you want and what you need. If you need a safe place to live, owning your own home might be a want but not a need. If you have a car that gets you to work, a new model SUV might be a want and not a need. But if you're unemployed, securing a job that you love is both a want and a need. And if you're battling cancer, healing is both a want and a need.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow, born at the beginning of the twentieth century, identified our basic human needs as air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, and reproduction. The next tier of needs he identified were needs for personal security, employment, resources, health, and property. Next, he named relational needs: friendship, intimacy, family, and a sense of connection. There are a few higher-order needs, but these are the basics.

This afternoon, beloved, be bold in coming before the God who longs to meet your needs.

PRAYER PROMPT

God, You know that I need _____.

Today I am trusting You to be my good Provider.

Jot down your needs and notice how God meets them.

EVENING INSPIRATION

If God answered all your prayers, would the world look different, or just your life?

—Dave Willis, pastor

Ouch.

Convicting.

It's natural to ask God for what we want and need. But God also welcomes us to pray for others!

Author Philip Yancey offers:

When I pray for another person, I am praying for God to open my eyes so that I can see that person as God does, and then enter into the stream of love that God already directs toward that person.

Isn't this such a comfort? Maybe you know exactly what a person needs from God. Great! But often we don't know exactly how to pray for another. Romans 8:26 encourages us: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for,

but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”
And our joining the Spirit’s groans is what Yancey is describing.

Tears are prayers too. They travel to God when we can’t speak.
—See *Psalm 56:8*

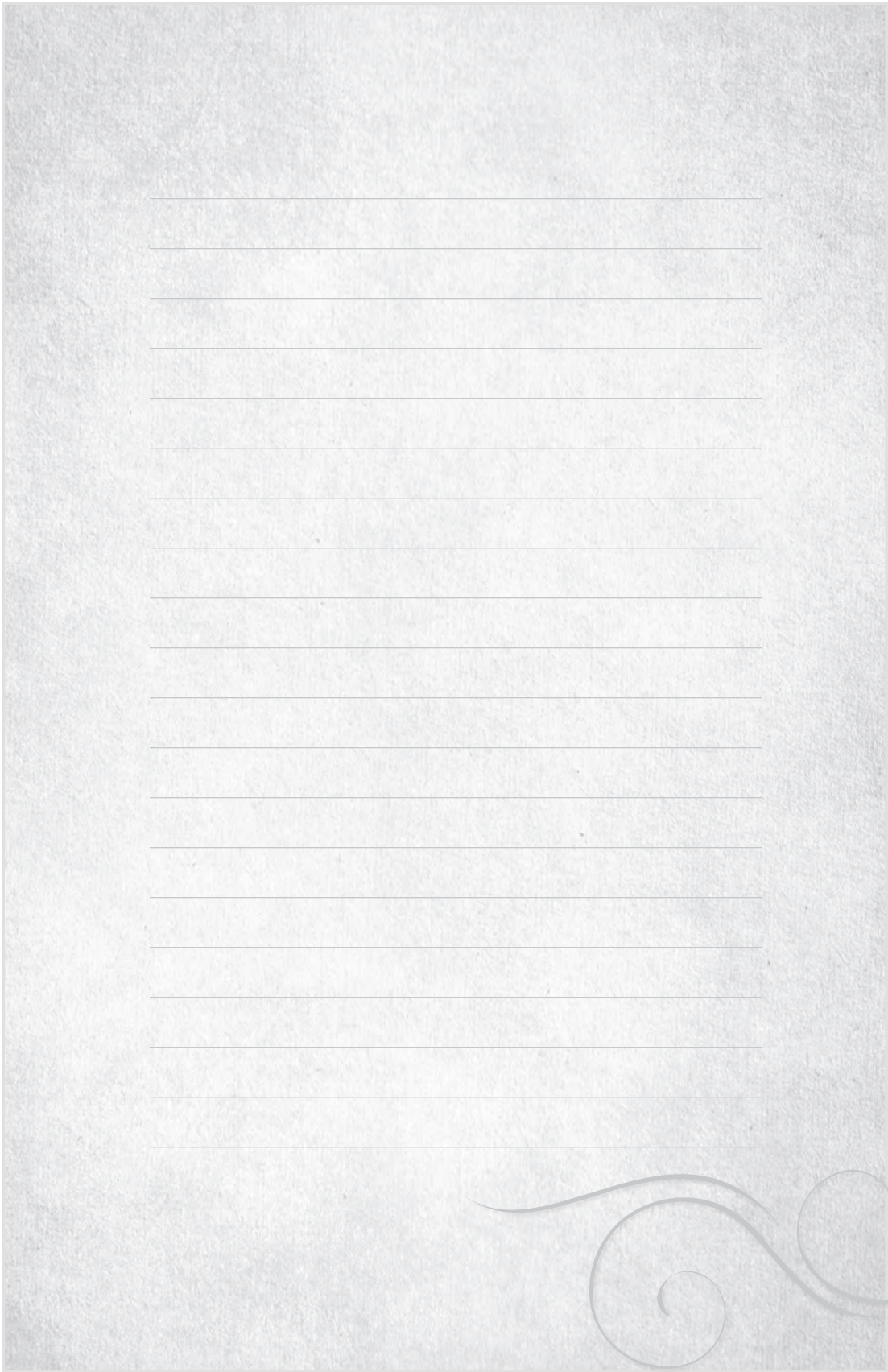
This evening, notice one person whom God has put on your heart to pray for. Who in your life most needs God’s touch, God’s word, God’s leading? Ask God to open your eyes to see that person as God does. And then, as you pray with the power of the Spirit operating in you, join the stream of love God is already pouring out upon that person.

And here’s another thought: Who or what do you *not* want to pray for? That’s convicting too.

If there is a person or situation that you should pray for but don’t really want to pray for, do *that* today.

Why, you ask?

Because it brings glory to God when you push past your feelings to have His heart for people, hard circumstances, and difficult challenges. When you pray for those who hurt or persecute you and show concern for circumstances that you’d rather not be a part of, you experience the heart of God. And He smiles.



DAY 4 · *Thursday*

YIELD

Today we are considering what it means to surrender to God.

MORNING MEDITATION

I am not in control, but I am deeply loved by the one who is.
—Glenn Packiam

What does it mean to yield?

The dictionary defines *yield* as “to give way to arguments, demands, or pressure; to relinquish possession of something or to give something up; to cease to argue about.”

So my question to you is, Where do you need to quit arguing with God? What do you need to simply give Him control of?

The answer doesn't have to be life altering.

I mean, sure, He could be asking you to move to Costa Rica to be a missionary, but He's probably asking you to be a faithful servant on the mission field down the hallway.

Take a moment and think of where God has been convicting you, nudging you, or speaking to you. What has been coming to your mind and your heart frequently this week? What step do you sense you need to take? Where in your life do you need to surrender to God's plan?

Surrender. That's another word for yield.

The more you surrender your life to God's will by spending time with Him and walking in obedience, the more you will also get out of the way and allow God's power to fill you and work in and through you.

So think about it.

Ask Jesus what He thinks.

Then, if you are so inclined, write about it on the blank page at the end of today's prayers.

What will you give to God this week as a result of your praise, your gratitude, your need for forgiveness, and the requests you've made of Him?

PRAYER PROMPT

Dear God, you can have _____. Help me to get out of the way.

AFTERNOON REFLECTION

*We aren't called to walk in our strength;
we are called to work in His.*

And think about this: how do you need to let go and follow God's leading instead of trying to orchestrate your life?

I know it's hard to let go. We like to feel that we are in charge of our lives. But I want you to know that some things end up being harder than they have to be because you insist on doing them in your own strength.

This is a lesson that I've had to learn the hard way. Yielding to God and releasing my grip makes life easier. While I'm responsible

for what I do with my life, living a yielded life allows me to rest knowing that Someone else has an even greater responsibility for my life and is invested in guiding my steps.

Have you surrendered *that* area to God, the area where you've been working so hard?

Surrender doesn't mean you don't work, it just means you don't move ahead of God and what He has clearly asked you, convicted you, or empowered you to do.

His strength can take you so much farther than your will.

Each Friday of this prayer journey, the focus is on yielding or surrendering your life—in big ways and small ways—to the Father.

Do you trust Him? Answer the question truthfully. Then tell Him. Tell Him whether the answer is a resounding yes or a bit of a shameful no. He knows anyway. Be honest for the sake of authenticity with God.

Even if you don't feel like you trust Him, *do* something today to act like you do. Trust Him to take care of what you hand Him today.

What does trusting Him actually look like in your life? What would you do differently if you chose to rely on God to do the heavy lifting?

Breathe deeply. Take a chance on Him. What's your first step if you believe that He's good and that He's got everything under control?

It's okay if your heart is beating a little faster.

Feet don't have to follow feelings, but they should always follow the Father.

EVENING INSPIRATION

Lord, I can't say it in words.

Can You please just listen through my heart?

I know you may be tempted to jump into bed. Maybe it has been a long day, a long week, or even a long year. I know you are tired.

But yesterday we discovered that the Holy Spirit can share the deepest parts of our hearts when we don't have the insight or energy to utter a single word.

Get still and talk to God from your heart. Praying from your heart works when you're praying for others and you don't know how to pray. It also works when you want to yield your entire being to God.

Tell God that you want to surrender your life to Him. And then once you run out of words, just ask Him to read between the beats of your heart and decode the message you can't put together. He will hear. He will comfort. He will answer. Consider tipping your hands up to God, palms open, to demonstrate a posture of yielding to His will and not your own.

