

21 SECONDS TO CHANGE YOUR WORLD

FINDING GOD'S HEALING AND
ABUNDANCE THROUGH PRAYER

DR. MARK RUTLAND



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To all who, down but not out,
rise from the mat,
lift their weary gloves,
and wade back in for more.

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Foreword

Have you ever heard someone talk about how their entire life changed—their entire life was saved—because they had a thought that was just out of character enough to think upon it and act?

There are tons of stories about people hearing a quiet voice in their heads saying something like *Hey, just look up*, or *Turn left at the corner*, or even something as universal as *You are loved*.

For me, that voice is loudest when I write. Writing is where I listen and record, but there is still a gap between this writing and that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit—and I pray every day that God will meet me in the middle. Prayer is about listening to His voice in the depths of your heart. I hit my knees so that voice will get louder and louder.

Dr. Rutland shares his vulnerable story of when he heard the voice say, “You have a prayer,” which was a catalyst for personal restoration and rebirth. The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the heart, mind, and soul of the one who prays.

If I had to teach *one* message over and over and over again, it would be how to pray. The good news is that the best teacher

in the history of mankind made it really easy for people like me to teach this message. Thousands of years ago Jesus gave us a template; we call it “The Lord’s Prayer.”

Thus *21 Seconds to Change Your World*, with its strangely simple and wildly profound message, was born. This book is bold. This book is vulnerable. This book is revolutionary. By combining two ancient poems, Dr. Rutland has given us a compass for our intellect and our spirituality that is both universal and sufficient. In the Lord’s Prayer and Psalm 23, everything that you might feel needs to be said when you pray is said beautifully—whether it’s solitarily or congregationally.

I’ve always said that I believe we are all only one prayer away from a totally different life. But Dr. Rutland has taken it a step further. It’s exactly 21 seconds. That is not a long time to completely revolutionize your world.

But let me clarify that this message is not about a time limit or succinctness or turning prayer into something to check off your list. It’s an exegetical look at the beauty, simplicity, diligence, and profundity found in something that we’ve all likely taken for granted merely because it has been there forever. Dr. Rutland looks at this mega-prayer narratively, historically, structurally, literarily, and practically. He takes us all the way back to the man who first prayed it and asks, “If it’s good enough for Jesus, isn’t it good enough for us?”

If you ask me what I pray for more than anything else, the answer is hands-down the favor of God. While it’s difficult to describe or define, the favor of God is what God can do for you that you cannot do for yourself. Asking for a better way to pray is a prayer that can and should be prayed. It’s funny that prayer is one of the most difficult and simplest things to do every single day. Sometimes, though it might be all we have, it’s hard to find the right words. We can all attest to this. Who hasn’t felt the blush of guilt from having to admit that you

don't pray enough or that you should pray more? But always remember one thing when it comes to prayer—it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart. The Bible gave us the words, and this book reinforces and sheds a new and relevant light on them.

You are only 21 seconds away from living a totally different life.

Mark Batterson

Acknowledgments

I recently read an author's acknowledgment in which he testified that even as a child he wanted to write just such an acknowledgment. I suppose this might simply be his way of saying he wanted to be published, for without a book there is no need of acknowledgments. Yet he seemed to be saying something else. It seems he had read a book with acknowledgments in it and he was touched. He determined at that very moment that he would someday write a moving acknowledgment page.

I admit to no such childhood fantasy of writing acknowledgments. I wanted to write books. I admit that. I was not, as far as I remember, all that excited about the acknowledgments. As I have gotten older, however, I have come to see what an honor it is to be named by an author as having been important to the process of producing that book.

As far as I know, I have never been acknowledged in the front of anyone's book. I should like to be and I brazenly appeal to whomever is so moved to do so. I would prefer the acknowledgment to be extravagant. I urge total disregard for propriety or modest language or fear of inflating my ego. Go for it! Tell all

who will listen how your book would not have been possible without me and my invaluable contribution.

In my mind, the greater part is to be acknowledged. I hope those mentioned here feel genuinely honored to such an extent that their heads swell dangerously and their hearts are sorely tempted to pride. I do not want them to feel casually mentioned, as in a child's prayer. God bless Mommy and Daddy and my friend Jimmy and all my toy soldiers. No. I want those acknowledged by me to fairly burst with delight. I herein acknowledge no one out of obligation. They are mentioned intentionally and with deep gratitude. Their contribution to this book is of tremendous value to me. I cherish what they have done or endured or contributed in order to see this book in print, and I pray that they feel gratified with the finished work. What follows is a book written by one but to which many were crucial.

This book was written out of a struggle. I did not go through that struggle alone. Without my wife, Alison, this book quite simply would not have been written. She is a woman of prayer. I thank God for her and I openly acknowledge the fact—the huge, wonderful, undeniable fact—that without her I would not have written this book. It is not just that without her I would not be the author of this book; without her it is very likely that I simply would not be.

I gratefully acknowledge two wonderful pastors, Wayne Blackburn and Lawrence Lockett. They believed in me. May they be blessed beyond measure. The promise of obtaining mercy is unto the likes of them.

My deepest thanks go also to James Leatherbarrow and Severo Baltasar, without whose patient efforts in tech support and editorial assistance the task would have been even more daunting than it was.

Finally, I rejoice to acknowledge the God of the two Jewish kings whose prayers are the basis of this book. In a terrifying

Acknowledgments

valley I found Him to be the Good Shepherd and the restorer of my soul, just as David said I would. In days as dark as night I found Him to be the loving and forgiving Father whose mercies are new every morning, just as Jesus promised.

Mark Rutland, PhD
2015

PART I

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

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1

How the Lord's Prayer saved my life

The awful night into which I had entered was either to be the end of me or the start of something fuller and freer than I had ever known. The walls of the well into which I had plunged were damp and slimy. There was nothing to grip. I knew which way was up. I could even see the light above me. I had been there before. Now, however, I had slipped into a dark and terrible place called depression.

I was not at the bottom yet. Was there a bottom? The pit yawned below me with no apparent floor, while I perched on a narrow ledge partway down and clung to life and ached for a way back up.

I had not been thrown into this well. I had fallen. Fatigue, toxic success, and, subsequently, depression had subverted my soul. I had quite simply gotten lost and pitched headlong into this pit of despair.

My soul's dilemma was no different from that of any soul stranded on life's ledge: What do I do now? There were easy escapes. I could leap further in, but the horrifying finality of that kept me there on the ledge. Half-life was also there, of course—not the pit, not the gaping darkness below me, but not the light above me either. I could just quit, settle in on that lonely ledge, and try to live it out right there, if existence on such a ledge between the darkness and the light can even be called life.

A loving wife who refused to quit, refused to let go of my hand, and a tiny corps of true friends who were there telling me to hold on, to see it through, to wait on the good hand of a loving God who was stronger than depression and fear and darkness—they were my lifeline. Without them, especially my wife, there was no hope as far as I could see, but I needed, desperately needed to find a solid rock to stand on, a broader place than that miserable, precarious ledge. Even more than that, I needed a place to grip. If I was going to climb back up into the light, if I was ever going to get further into the light than I had ever been, if I was going to get to a place of health I'd never known, I knew what I had to find. A place to start. A handhold.

A voice spoke from below me in the darkness. Or was it from within me? I wasn't sure. A voice said what I was thinking: "You don't have a prayer."

Then, right at that very moment, from above me, from out of the light, another Voice spoke. "Yes," that Voice said. "Yes, you do. You have a prayer if you will learn to use it."

My journey into soul restoration began there, right that minute, in one of the darkest times of my life, when I discovered that I did indeed have a prayer. The greatest, most powerful prayer ever is a simple one—an ancient one—in fact. The prayer was originally taught by a Jewish rabbi almost two millennia ago.

Now it came alive for me. Perhaps I should say it came alive *in* me. It became my life. I breathed it. I marinated my poor brain in it. I said it multiple times a day, sometimes scores of times. I clung to it, clutched at it as a drowning man clings to a raft in the middle of a storm-racked sea. It was my meat, my friend, my comfort in the night. I meditated on it, grew to cherish its words, its structure, its brilliant and magnificently anointed economy of language. Not a syllable is wasted, not a jot or tittle is superfluous. Yet its perfection is more, far more, than literary genius. Its power is supernatural. It is the greatest prayer ever taught or prayed. It heals, delivers, protects, empowers, and provides for those who pray it. Beyond even that, it is the only prayer that particular rabbi ever taught His followers. His name was Jesus. Nowadays most of those who pray the words that rabbi taught are Gentiles. They call it the Lord's Prayer or the Our Father.

Over the course of those painful years, nearly ten years, where I prayed the Lord's Prayer like a drowning man, I added to my daily saturation in that prayer an ancient song, or perhaps a poem, written not by a Jewish rabbi but by a Jewish king. David, Israel's greatest and most complicated king, wrote the poem a thousand years before Jesus of Nazareth was born. Today Jews and Gentiles alike still use the poem devotionally. It's called the Twenty-third Psalm.

I began with the Lord's Prayer, then later mixed in the Twenty-third Psalm. Prayed back to back, over and over and over again, dozens of times a day, they became the lifeline that hauled me up from the pit and put my feet in a broad place. They were medicine and life and health to me. They became the recipe of the divine. Now, all these years later, I still pray them together, time after time, every single day of my life. Praying them together so often, hundreds, perhaps thousands of times over these years, I began to see how beautifully the Lord's Prayer

and Psalm 23 fit together. They are gears that interlock gently, perfectly, never grinding, turning the human soul toward the healing for which it yearns. Seen, prayed, and laid out side by side, the parallel splendor of the two is absolutely miraculous.

Come with me now. Let me introduce you or, more likely, reintroduce you to my beloved friends, the Lord's Prayer and Psalm 23. Of course, they are not my friends alone. They have brought healing power to millions for centuries. I invite you to meet them, or meet them again, and come to know them more intimately, perhaps more fully than you ever have before.

How the Prayer Fell Into Disuse

Two very disparate elements of Christendom have regrettably nudged the Lord's Prayer toward a musty and seldom opened cabinet. It happened because of equal and opposite errors, but the effect was the same: assumed irrelevance. The Roman Catholic use of the Lord's Prayer for acts of penance sometimes devolved in the minds of Catholic laypeople into punishment rather than penance: "Say three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys and do something nice for the person you hurt." The intent was to push the penitent soul straight into a dynamic encounter with spiritual formation. Somewhere along the line, for some, saying the Our Father became the parochial version of writing "I will not talk in class" one hundred times on the blackboard.

Some traditional Protestants deposited the great prayer in the dustbin of spiritual irrelevance, or at least powerlessness, in quite another way: liturgy. By relegating the Lord's Prayer almost exclusively to liturgy, it became the mindless suffix to the pastoral prayer, the obligatory annex tacked on corporately just before the amen. Droned through with bovine enthusiasm, the prayer became to genuine spiritual formation what outdoor lights became to the meaning of Christmas.

Charismatics and Pentecostals finished the job. Paranoid about any possible liturgical subversion and terrified that something might look—God forbid—traditional, they by and large ignored the Lord’s Prayer. When I became the president at Oral Roberts University, certainly the best known charismatic university in the world, I began to occasionally use the Lord’s Prayer corporately in the chapel services. It was not long before one mother called me in tears that her daughter was in “spiritual pain” at being subjected to such a practice. I was, she maintained, destroying the students’ worship experience. Pointing out to her that Jesus gave us the prayer and commanded us to use it proved an irrelevant and effete argument in the face of her deeply held convictions. Christian college students, she insisted, should not be put through such a grueling and Spirit-killing experience as praying the Lord’s Prayer together in chapel.

Some charismatics even dismissed the prayer as “too elementary” and lacking in faith. Odd, isn’t it, since it is the prayer Jesus told us to pray. I find myself reluctant to dismiss the Lord’s direction on prayer. It could be that those who believe they have “moved beyond it” have marched on to some greater victory, leaving their ammunition behind.

I found much more winsome the response of a visitor at Free Chapel Church in Orange County, California. After hearing me teach at length, she told me how excited she was to go home and memorize the prayer and start using it. She said she had never heard the prayer before and found it quite beautiful and that hearing it had a powerful effect on her. I was surprised that she had come to adulthood without having ever heard the Lord’s Prayer until she explained that she was Jewish.

“It is a Jewish prayer,” I told her. “A Jewish rabbi taught it to His Jewish followers. It was decades before any Gentiles ever heard it or prayed it.”

Absolutely delighted with this fact—and it is a fact—and utterly charmed by the prayer itself, she assured me that she would use it just as I recommended. Not coincidentally that conversation and the thrill of discovery I saw in her eyes in no small part helped me decide to write this book. Have you laid aside the Lord's Prayer? Has it become perfunctory? Or even forgotten? What about the Twenty-third Psalm? Does it thrill you to pray it? Is it the medicine of your very soul's restoration? Do you merely repeat it without considering its importance? How long since you prayed or meditated on the psalm?

That precious Jewish woman was not the sole encouragement I received to write this book. Pastor Jentezen Franklin invited me to teach on this at Free Chapel Church. He expressed that he was personally touched in a new way by the ancient prayer. He graciously but firmly pressed me to write this book—and furthermore, not to wait. My wife, Alison, also urged me to do so. In other words, two of the most significant Christian spirits in my life seemed as blessed as that Jewish visitor.

I interpreted that to mean that the book might be a blessing to neophytes and veterans alike. I was, of course, thrilled that a Jewish woman who had never heard the Lord's Prayer could express such genuine excitement for this teaching. Knowing that two wonderful, mature, experienced Christian leaders such as Alison and Pastor Franklin were so deeply stirred was the impetus I needed.

The Lord's Prayer and the Twenty-third Psalm together became the cocktail of life that healed my mind. Mixed and well-shaken, repeated back to back, over and over again, prayed aloud, prayed silently, desperately, and joyfully, sometimes with such ragged faith that it could hardly be called faith, these two ancient devotional instruments became the medicine of my soul's restoration.

There is, of course, the issue of this book's title. I found that it takes about 21 seconds to pray the Lord's Prayer. Try it.

See how long it takes you. This is a remarkably short amount of time to do something so powerful—to commune with God about the state of your soul.

For the purpose of this book, I am using the version of the Lord's Prayer recorded in the book of Matthew in the King James Version. The noteworthy difference between the KJV translation and the version more commonly prayed in public by Protestants is that the Scripture uses the word *debts* instead of *trespasses*. The word *debts* is also used in the classical musical version of the Lord's Prayer. Later in this book I will discuss how those two words (*debts* versus *trespasses*) and an understanding of both enrich the implications of the Lord's Prayer. Try not to get hung up on the words. If one version or another appeals, by all means, use that one. In appendix B you will find the Lord's Prayer in multiple languages.

Psalms 23 in this book will also be quoted from the King James Version. This is for two reasons. First, most people who have, sometime in their lives, even back in Sunday school, memorized Psalm 23, did so in the King James Version. Likewise, it is the version most often used in public worship. Beyond that, quite frankly, it is simply my preference. I personally cherish the rich Shakespearean sound of Psalm 23 in the King James Version, and no other translation has ever hit me with anywhere near the same impact. Again, if you prefer some other translation, please use that one. Of course, in heaven you will have to answer to both King David and Shakespeare.

Come then. Veteran, visitor, window-shopper, or sanctified saint, this is for you. Take my hand and let us begin. You're going to love this.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in
heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from
evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
for ever.
Amen.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth
me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of
righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of
death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy
rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of
mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my
cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days
of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
for ever.