

CHAD VEACH

**PRAY
ABOUT
EVERYTHING
DEVOTIONAL
JOURNAL**



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Teach Us to Pray

Do you have one of those friends who tends to wander off? Small children do this too, and create absolute panic for their parents, but at least they have an excuse—they're kids. Your absentminded friend is supposed to be more responsible and considerate.

We all know someone like this. You're at the mall, for example, and suddenly they're gone. No warning, no explanation, no communication. A while later, they reappear with some perfectly logical (to them) reason for taking off. A sale they couldn't pass up, or a friend they ran into, or a sudden craving for Cinnabon. So they disappeared, but they neglected to inform the rest of the group.

Jesus did that regularly, and I'm sure it drove His disciples crazy. He wasn't chasing sales or catching up with friends or sneaking cinnamon rolls, though. Usually, He was praying. Mark records one example:

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. (1:35–39)

It's interesting that Jesus completely ignores their questions and expectations, and instead just tells them it's time to go. He knew when He needed to pray, and He knew when He needed to work. And He wasn't going to let His disciples' scheduling get in the way.

Jesus makes prayer a priority, no matter how busy or in demand He was. Luke says this about Jesus' habit of prayer: "Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (5:15–16).

Eventually, the disciples figured out that Jesus wasn't just easily distracted from "real life." Rather, He understood prayer. He needed prayer. It was a huge part of His ministry and His relationship to God. His disciples could see that, and they wanted to know more. They wanted to experience that kind of power, that level of intimacy with God, for themselves.

Luke describes what happened next: "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'" (11:1).

So Jesus did.

He gave them what is now probably the most famous prayer in all of Christianity: the Lord's Prayer. And He taught them in detail about how to (and how not to) pray. You can read more about it in Matthew 6 and Luke 11.

That is amazing, if you think about it. Jesus often ignored or evaded questions. He knew that in order to learn, people needed to seek answers for themselves. But when it came to prayer, He didn't tell them to go figure things out on their own. He took the time to walk them through the dynamics of prayer. Why? I think it was because He knew the value of prayer, and He wanted His disciples to experience that firsthand.

First, He taught about it; then He told them to pray. Prayer is one of those things that requires both hearing and doing. You can learn about prayer from someone else, but in order to truly know how to pray, you have to do it for yourself.

Learning about prayer is the goal behind my recent book, *Worried about Everything Because I Pray about Nothing: How to Live with Peace and Purpose Instead of Stress and Burnout*. I wanted to describe the benefits, pitfalls, and best practices of prayer.

The devotional you are holding in your hands now, though, is different. It's less about teaching and more about *practice*. That's why each chapter focuses on a topic to pray about as well as a specific technique or type of prayer. My hope is that by the end of this devotional, you won't just know *facts* about prayer, but you will have intentionally experienced many different ways of praying.

The book consists of twenty-one short chapters divided into six sections. Each section focuses on a general category of ways to pray: *speak, write, move, create, contemplate, and share*.

The twenty-one chapters are intended to be read one per day, although you can move along at whatever pace works for you. You'll find that each chapter follows the same format, which is based on the acrostic PRAY.

P— Passage

R— Reflection

A— Approach

Y— You

The daily *passage* is a specific prayer or a teaching on prayer from the Bible. The *reflection* section discusses a topic that you will be praying about that day. *Approach* refers to a prayer style or technique that you can use during your prayer time. And *you*, of course, are the catalyst that brings it all together.

I am especially excited about the potential of the approach section. You will explore twenty-one unique ways to pray—which might mean stepping out of your comfort zone just a bit. That's a good thing, though, right? Comfort zones are overrated. You might even discover a new favorite way to pray.

Ultimately, this book is only a starting point. Your prayer life is yours. You don't have to pray like anyone else, and you certainly don't have to pray to impress anyone else.

Like Jesus, just do what you need to do. Pray when and how you need to pray. Make prayer work for you—because prayer was created for you, not you for prayer.

And like the disciples, be intentional about learning to pray. With that in mind, I encourage you to try out all the different prayer

approaches and see what works for you. Feel free to tweak them as you go, or make notes of how you could improve in the future. Be bold, and have fun exploring ways to pray that you might never have considered. Some things—like art and silence—might not even sound like prayer at first, but they can add a lot to your communication with God and your spiritual walk.

More than anything, enjoy the journey. God loves to listen to you and talk to you, and your willingness to come to Him in prayer is what matters most. If you let Him, He will teach you to pray.

SPEAK: PRAYING WITH YOUR VOICE

Prayer takes many forms, some of which we'll explore in the next twenty-one days together. Since prayer is about communication, it makes sense to begin by looking at the voice of prayer: that is, how we can use our words to draw nearer to God.

Talking comes easily for most of us. But listening? Not so much. We probably all have a friend who talks too much. And if you don't, well, you know what they say—maybe you are that friend. So we will explore not just how to use your voice to pray, but also how to listen to God's voice. God wants to share a conversation with you. He wants to have a relationship that is easy, natural, open, and real.

Over the next few days, we'll explore several themes relating to God's protection, compassion, goodness, and love, as well as our need to surrender to Him. We'll also look at different ways of praying about these topics.

Some methods might seem easy and natural to you, while others might be a new experience. Either way, embrace the process. See where it takes you. I think you'll find your prayer life will become deeper and richer than ever before.

Are you ready?

———— DAY 1 ————

A Call for Protection

LORD, how many are my foes!
How many rise up against me!
Many are saying of me,
“God will not deliver him.”
But you, LORD, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my head high.
I call out to the LORD,
and he answers me from his holy mountain.
I lie down and sleep;
I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.
I will not fear though tens of thousands
assail me on every side.
—a prayer of David (Psalm 3:1–6)

reflecting on prayer

GOD OUR PROTECTOR

Back when I was in high school, I was riding in a car that was hit by a cement truck. Getting T-boned by a thirty-ton truck was bad enough, but what really freaked me out was when a panicked passenger in our car shouted, “It’s gonna blow!” as we were climbing out of the vehicle. Naturally, we all took off running as fast as we could until we collapsed, panting, a safe distance from our ticking time bomb of a car.

Our car didn’t blow up. It didn’t even catch fire. Apparently, cars are less explosive in real life than in the movies. I escaped with nothing worse than a broken thumb and a newfound prejudice toward cement trucks.

The threat wasn’t real, but my fear was. I thought I was going to die. I’m sure I didn’t look sophisticated or cool as I ran away, but I didn’t care. I wanted safety at all costs.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow pictured human needs as a pyramid, with the most basic needs at the bottom and less urgent ones toward the top. Maslow suggested that after physiological needs (food, water, etc.), the most fundamental need we feel is the need for safety.¹

When you think about it, this makes sense. From birth, every infant has an inborn desire to eat, drink, and feel safe.

If those are lacking, regardless of the time of night it might be or how inconvenient it is for the sleep-deprived parents, that infant will let his needs be known. Loudly, persistently, and passionately.

That desire for safety doesn't go away as we get older. We are wired to protect ourselves, to seek out others who make us feel safe, and to protect those we care about.

The problem is that life isn't safe. Some risks are completely out of our control. Life moves too fast, and it is too unpredictable. The result of that is a generalized feeling of anxiety. Fear. Borderline panic.

Those emotions have almost come to define our culture today. But they aren't by-products of modern society. They are as old as humanity. We didn't invent anxiety, we just found new things to worry about. We didn't invent fear, we can just spread bad news faster now. The emotions stirred up by feeling unsafe are common to all people, no matter what generation or culture.

The Bible's answer is a simple one: We can trust God. When life is crazy, when things are falling apart, when we've just lost our job, when a close friend betrays us, when we don't know how to get ourselves out of the mess we are in—we can turn to God.

The Bible says God is

- our rock (Psalm 18:2).
- our fortress (Psalm 46:11).
- our shield (Psalm 18:2).
- our refuge (Psalm 91:2).
- our strength (Psalm 46:1).
- our provider (Genesis 22:14).
- our protector (Psalm 138:7).
- our Savior (Luke 2:11).
- our strength (Philippians 4:13).
- our deliverer (Psalm 18:1).

This doesn't mean God removes every trial from our lives. It doesn't mean He never allows a tragedy. Life includes suffering. We all know that. That's why the promise of heaven is so sweet: One day, all suffering will end.

But while God doesn't remove every trial or stop us from feeling pain, He does protect us. He can be trusted. There is safety in His shelter.

How about you? Do you feel safe? Or have anxiety, fear, and panic crept into your soul? Is it difficult to sleep because your mind seems permanently stuck in fight or flight mode? Do

the “what ifs” of a thousand unknown risks threaten to steal your joy?

If that’s you (and let’s be honest, it’s all of us at one time or another), I have good news. God hasn’t changed. The Deliverer who rescued Israel at the Red Sea can make a way for you today. The Rock who protected David from his enemies can save you from those who would like to see you fail. The Savior who healed Hezekiah can add years to your life too.

What are the biggest fears you are facing right now? What makes you most anxious? What costs you sleep? Bring those things to God in prayer. Stand on His promises and trust in His power. He is your rock and your deliverer.

Before you begin praying about God’s protection and aid, let’s take a look at one of the easiest ways to pray: praying out loud.

learning to pray

PRAY OUT LOUD

Praying out loud is a simple prayer technique that can help you process your thoughts and express them in prayer.

Chances are, you’ve verbalized your prayers before: when sitting down to a meal with your family, with your kids before

bed, at church. But what about when you're alone? When it's just you and God?

I want to encourage you to try *speaking* your prayers today, rather than just praying silently. Praying out loud has multiple benefits:

- It keeps your mind focused so your thoughts don't wander.
- It helps you verbalize your emotions.
- It brings clarity to your thoughts.
- It reminds you that God is listening to what you say.
- It gives you a chance to evaluate what you are saying from a different perspective. (If you've ever verbalized a thought to a friend and then said sheepishly, "That sounded better in my head," then you know the value of hearing your own words.)
- It increases your memory retention, so you are more likely to notice when God answers those prayers.

Praying out loud isn't about sounding more spiritual or being more religious, of course. God hears you whether you pray silently, whisper under your breath, speak out loud, or shout from a mountaintop. However, praying aloud can add richness, passion, and focus to your conversations with God.

putting it all together

A CALL FOR PROTECTION

As we saw above, one of our greatest needs is safety. During your prayer time today, spend a few minutes praying out loud for God's protection and help. Here are some ways to do that.

- Find a private place where you can pray out loud without being interrupted or feeling self-conscious.
- Take a moment to thank God (out loud, remember) for what He has done for you. Recognize His strength and faithfulness. Remind yourself that you are safe in His arms. You don't have to shout at the top of your lungs; just speak loud enough that you can hear yourself. Your words are building your own faith.
- Then, tell God about what makes you anxious. Pray about the issues in your present or future that stir up fear. Confess the things that keep you up at night. Ask for His help, both to keep you safe and to give you peace and rest in the middle of the storm.
- Pray until you feel God's peace fill your heart. You will find your emotions and thoughts begin to shift because your words have power. They change your attitude, focus your mind, bring perspective and balance to your emotions, and strengthen your faith.

QUESTIONS for REFLECTION

When you have finished, answer the following questions. Like speaking, writing helps clarify your thoughts and reactions.

1. Are there specific areas where you need God's protection? After praying, do you feel a greater sense of safety?
2. How did it feel to pray out loud?
3. What was the most beneficial part of praying this way?