



THE ONE YEAR[®]
PRAYING
in FAITH
DEVOTIONAL

*365 Daily Bible Readings on Hearing God
and Believing His Promises*

CHRIS TIEGREEN

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Introduction

YOU'VE PRAYED. You've waited. And you've wondered. You've eagerly embarked on this journey of faith, but that journey has raised a lot of questions and involved long distances between resting points. Like many Christians, you know about God's promises and you've received answers to prayer, but you've also felt as if some prayers have led nowhere. That combination of beliefs and experiences is disorienting at times. On the one hand, you live and pray with a strong conviction that God answers prayer. On the other, you aren't quite sure how it all works.

Your journey of faith, no matter how confusing it may be at times, creates a wonderful opportunity to draw closer to God and dive deeper into his Word. That's one of the purposes of growing your faith, and it's also the purpose of this devotional. These readings will help you walk out that journey with increasing insight and meaning if you've ever

- been frustrated with a shot-in-the-dark approach to prayer;
- stood in the gap between promise and fulfillment, questioning why things are taking so long;
- wondered why God can seem so close one day and so distant the next;
- felt the tension between your deep desires and his will; or
- needed daily encouragement about the challenges of prayer and the hope God offers when we bring our requests to him.

Sometimes we need a thousand assurances that God's promises are true and our prayers are effective before we believe it. Consider this devotional to be a collection of 365 of those assurances.

But it's more than just assurances and affirmations. This book is an explorer's guide to the dynamics of faith: how it works in the human heart and mind and how we can train ourselves to believe more purely, consistently, and purposefully. The readings will connect a lot of points between the thoughts and attitudes we bring into our prayers and the answers and fulfillment we receive from them.

There are many kinds of prayer. This devotional touches on adoration, thanksgiving, and confession, but it focuses primarily on requests, petitions, or supplications—not because asking is the most important kind of prayer but because it seems to be the kind we have the most questions about. We instinctively bring our longings to God and cry out to him in times of need, and we crave his responses. So these readings are centered on those prayers of faith, those times when we ask God for something specific. This devotional is not meant to be a comprehensive treatment of faith, nor a complete picture of prayer. But it does go deep into the spiritual, mental, emotional, relational, and circumstantial dynamics we experience in the prayer process.

You'll see some common themes and tensions in these pages, all of which are rooted in Scripture. For example, God tells us we can be confident that he will answer our prayers but calls us to be flexible when he doesn't—or at least when he doesn't answer them the way we expect him to. He wants to both accomplish his purposes and fulfill our desires, and learning how these two concerns merge can be both frustrating and rewarding. We experience tension between the here and now of our lives and the there-and-then of eternity, even while our prayers operate in both realms. We keep our eyes on the circumstances around us but also have to search behind the scenes, where only faith can see. We struggle to discern the difference between God's voice and our own impulses, between God's silence and God's "no," and between waiting patiently in faith and taking action in faith. We encounter mysteries and forks in the road at almost every turn.

That is the challenge, adventure, and joy of genuine prayer, and it's a significant part of our walk with God. My prayer is that this book will help you draw closer to him on all counts and at every turn. May you experience him, connect your heart to his, and receive his warm and generous responses more and more each day.

God's Heart and Ours

[Jesus said,] "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!" JOHN 15:7

ONE OF THE PRIMARY WAYS God accomplishes his purposes on earth is through the prayers of his people. And one of our primary motivations for prayer is the desires in our hearts. It's a remarkable dynamic, but we seem to have something of a love-hate relationship with it. On the one hand, the longings within us instinctively find a voice in our prayers; on the other, we mistrust those desires and plead for *his* will to be done. Scripture shows us, however, that God blesses our requests when they are founded on a relationship of delight with him (Psalm 37:4). And Jesus assures us that our desires are trustworthy when our lives are based on him and his words (John 15:7). As much as we may mistrust our own desires, Scripture points us back to them.

It's true that God wants our desires to align with his, but that's not the unreachable, shot-in-the-dark kind of process we sometimes think it is. Throughout Scripture, his relationship with his people suggests not a unilateral, find-my-will-or-else agenda but a blending of hearts. We were created to come close to a Father who has made himself vulnerable to the longings of his people and to absorb his desires as he cares for and works through ours. He doesn't want to accomplish his purposes arbitrarily, independent of our hopes and dreams. He wants us to dream with him.

It's a beautiful thing when our dreams intersect with God's purposes. Doors open, miracles happen, the Kingdom advances, and hearts are fulfilled. It may not always be a smooth process—sometimes it's rather disorienting, in fact—but it's good. It's how God has chosen to partner with the people he has made in his image and called to fill the world with his goodness. It's his *modus operandi* in a world being restored back to him.

God shapes the world by prayer.

E. M. BOUNDS

Why We Pray

*The heavens belong to the LORD, but he has given the earth
to all humanity. PSALM 115:16*

AT THE BEGINNING, God gave human beings a responsibility to steward this planet. He did not enthrone us as autonomous kings, but he did design us to partner with him in his Kingship. Unfortunately, we squandered this enormous privilege and handed this stewardship over to unholy forces with dangerous agendas. Earth became infected with evil, and only those who were specially called seemed to recognize their role to intercede between heaven and earth. The keys God had given his people to his Kingdom were rarely used well.

But God became man in order to regain those keys and distribute them to people of faith. And today we are being remade in his image and restored to our royal stewardship of his Kingdom, with authority. Why? Because God honors his original plan. He has given us responsibility over this world, and he rarely intervenes unless we invite him. He is Lord, but we are his agents. And he has chosen not to circumvent his agents but to work through them. As landlords of his earthly holdings, we become cosigners of his decrees. We are the vehicles of his work on earth.

That's why we pray. Perhaps you see prayer as personal communication with God, a means of getting what you need from him, a conversation that draws you closer. It's that, but it's more. Many have wondered why God doesn't just go ahead and accomplish his will on his own, and this is a big part of the answer. God has chosen not to rule this world unilaterally. He designed us to be stewards at the beginning (Genesis 1:28), and we will rule with him in the end (Revelation 5:10). He has always sought people to intervene and, in the absence of a completely righteous person, became human himself in order to fulfill and restore human agency in his Kingdom (Isaiah 59:16-17). Now he has given us his own keys, reestablishing us as stewards and landlords to implement his will in this world (Matthew 16:19). One of the most effective and powerful ways to do that is through prayer.

Make that your mission. Invite God into every corner of your world. Partner with him in his answers. You are praying his Kingdom into earth.

Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the kingdom.

CHARLES SPURGEON

The Partnership of Prayer

The Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.

ROMANS 8:27

IMAGINE PRAYING TO GOD as if sitting across a table from him. As you present your requests, he looks across at you while listening to whatever is on your heart. Suddenly, you realize this is not the right setup for someone who has been completely reconciled to God and filled with his Spirit. He sees your expression and, knowing your heart already, nods in agreement. You get up, pull your chair around to his side of the table, and looking at your circumstances and the world together, you both have a conversation about the requests you were presenting a moment ago. Instead of sitting in the position of a negotiator, you are now sitting in a position of partnership. You and God are both involved in these prayers.

It is vital to hold this image or something like it in your mind when you pray. You are no longer trying to negotiate with God for a particular outcome; instead, you have been reconciled to him (2 Corinthians 5:18), and he has placed his Spirit inside of you (John 14:17; Romans 8:11). You are now in a partnership, with Jesus and the Holy Spirit interceding for you (Romans 8:26, 34) as you discuss with God his will and your desires. Though you still pray *to* him, more importantly you are praying *with* him. Knowing the difference can completely transform the nature of your prayer life.

No longer do you simply present an agenda to God and hope he stamps it with his approval. Now you can freely talk about your desires, listen for his input, let your conversations with him shape and reshape your requests, and offer those requests up, knowing they have already been vetted by the one who will ultimately carry them out. You still may not know the timing or the means, but you know the heart of the Father who helped you craft your prayers and sense agreement with him in your heart. You know his kind disposition toward your petitions and have confidence in his power to fulfill them. You and the Father, Son, and Spirit are praying as one.

Prayer is a summit meeting in the throne room of the universe.

RALPH A. HERRING

In Whose Name?

[Jesus said.] “You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father.” JOHN 14:13

SOMETHING INSIDE PULLS AT THE REINS of our prayers. *You don’t deserve this*, a voice might whisper. *You haven’t prayed intensely enough. You fell into sin just yesterday. This isn’t really a need. Your agenda and God’s are totally different. Who do you think you are, praying for such a request?* These objections make for a long internal conversation, and they limit our expectations of God. We ask for something small because we don’t want to assume anything too great of him. We bargain, vow, or offer up some self-imposed conditions. We even try to do our own part because we just aren’t convinced God gives as freely as our theology says he does.

All of those nagging suggestions of our own unworthiness, apathy, and irresponsibility would matter very much—if *we were praying in our own name*. But we’re not, are we? We’re praying in Jesus’ name. As much as we insert our own histories and insufficiencies into our prayers, they really aren’t relevant. After all, we aren’t coming to the throne of grace clothed in our own identity. We’re coming to it clothed in Jesus’ identity. And that changes everything.

When you pray in Jesus’ name—with his identity, righteousness, track record, and esteem—you can pray with extreme security and confidence. If he stands to inherit everything (Hebrews 1:2) and you are a coheir with him (Romans 8:16-17), then you can ask anything within his and your inheritance. Scripture never says you are partially identified with him. You are wholly, completely in him and never have to present your own ID when writing checks on his account. You’ll need to do that responsibly, of course, and within the outlines of his will—but never by your own merits. That’s why he tells you to pray in his name.

That’s really good news. It undoes all our insufficiencies in prayer. Whether we measure up no longer matters because we are praying in the name of someone who does. Knowing that, we have every reason to pray boldly in keeping with God’s purposes—as long as we are clothed in Jesus’ identity and praying in his name.

A Christian has a union with Jesus Christ more noble, more intimate, and more perfect than the members of a human body have with their head.

JOHN EUDES

Prioritizing Relationship

Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires.

PSALM 37:4

IT'S EASY IN A DISCUSSION of faith and prayer to become focused on the objects of our faith and prayers. After all, the process of prayer involves seeking answers, waiting for something to happen, and receiving the fulfillment of promises God has given. Prayer is more than just this, of course. But Jesus often spoke of what God would do in response to our prayers, and the response isn't just a nice bonus added on to a critical spiritual discipline. Those who say the point of prayer is to change us, not get something from God, are partly right but missing something. Jesus placed emphasis on receiving answers, not on the spiritual exercise itself. That's significant.

Still, we know better than to make prayer just a transaction. God is not our vending machine, our ATM, our drive-thru window, or our microwave oven. We can't just push the right buttons and get something in return. The foundation of our lives is an intimate relationship of love with the God who created us for exactly that purpose. Everything in the Christian life—not just prayer—comes from that source. Otherwise our desires are off target and usually self-focused.

Both sides of this relationship are captured in Psalm 37:4. The idea of having the desires of our hearts fulfilled is amazing and wonderful, but what kind of desires are they? Will they be good for us or destroy us? Are they focused entirely on ourselves or on a bigger picture? Without the first part of the verse, this is a dangerous promise. But in the context of a relationship of delight, joy, intimacy, and love, it's a beautiful commitment from a generous Father.

In your life of prayer, prioritize your relationship with God. Center your life on him to the degree that he can shape your desires and trust you as he fulfills them. He delights in giving abundantly to those who understand what to do with abundance. He wants his children to be fully satisfied in his love first and then in the gifts that flow from his love. In your journey of faith and prayer, begin there, where all other blessings start to grow.

Our love for God is tested by the question of whether we seek him or his gifts.

RALPH WASHINGTON SOCKMAN

Prioritizing Presence

You know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.

JOHN 14:17

IMAGINE A RIDICULOUSLY WEALTHY FATHER who has two sons. One son stops by his father's office every once in a while to say hello and, at some point, asks for a bit of money to help meet some need or desire. The father usually complies but gives only as much as the son needs and does so without much pleasure. The other son spends time with his father whenever he can. He enjoys home life, sometimes goes to work with his father to help out, and makes time to pursue mutual interests together. He has needs and desires too, and he rarely hesitates to ask his father to meet them. The father almost always does—and throws in some extras with great pleasure.

What's the difference between these two sons and the way they receive from their father? They both get their needs met, and both remain solid members of the family. But one relationship is satisfying, fulfilling, and overflowing with goodwill, while the other has turned into a transactional arrangement without much heart. The father loves both sons, to be sure, but he delights in his relationship with only one of them. And because he so delights in that relationship, he is eager to give. He doesn't just react to what his son needs; he takes great joy in anticipating it, providing it, celebrating it, and even going over the top with his answers from time to time.

That's a picture of two vastly different approaches to prayer, and it should be obvious which is more satisfying to us and to God. We were made for a relationship with him that is filled with deep love, joy, and affection. That's why the Holy Spirit is given to us—God himself resides within us at the deepest levels of intimacy. When we cultivate that sense of his presence, we are cultivating the context for real prayer and faith. This is where our vision, longings, and desire for God's will are implanted and incubated in our hearts. This is what makes a life of prayer and faith fruitful and fulfilling—and what stirs the Father's joy in giving.

Why should not every moment of our lives be a
sort of communion with the divine love?

JEAN PIERRE DE CAUSSADE

A Giving God

... who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

1 TIMOTHY 6:17, ESV

MANY PEOPLE WANT TO PRAY more effectively. But we can't do so without knowing about the one we are praying to. Our perception of God is all-important, shaping everything that goes through our hearts and minds when we lift our requests to him. If we don't know he is generous by nature—one who blesses and desires to pour out his gifts on people who will appreciate them, enjoy them, and celebrate them—our faith will lie dormant in our hearts. Yes, God provides for those who hardly recognize his provision as gifts and for those who thank him but then stay away. But he delights in giving to those who draw closer to him after receiving from his hand. He loves giving to grateful, joyful recipients.

Paul addressed this dynamic of receiving in his first letter to Timothy. The “rich in this world” (6:17, NLT) should not put their trust in their riches, receiving from God and then ignoring him as if they earned what they got. But in that warning, Paul added an often-neglected phrase about God: he “richly provides us with everything to enjoy.” There is no hint that the original language means “just what you need but no more,” as so many of us tend to assume. No, he is not the stern father afraid of spoiling his children or the master who feels responsible only for his servants' barest needs. He is extravagant, rich, magnanimous, openhearted, and openhanded. He has already lavished us with gifts, many of which we take for granted. And he wants to pour out even more—but on the terms of faith, and in hearts that will bear the fruit of gratitude, joy, and generosity. In other words, he wants his children to be just like him, apples that don't fall far from the tree. He wants us to be openhearted and openhanded too.

Expect good things from God. Pray with awareness that he is the most generous Father ever. Ask for the sake of your enjoyment, but spread the joy. His hand opens to hearts that are open to him.

God always has an open ear and a ready hand,
if you have an open and ready heart.

CHARLES SPURGEON