
SEVEN DAILY DEVOTIONS ON LEARNING TO PRAY



TEACH US TO PRAY



Queensland Baptists

PRAYER WEEK 1 - 7 JUNE 2020

TEACH US TO PRAY

Introduction to the seven daily devotions

There is nothing simpler than prayer.

It doesn't require special knowledge.
It doesn't require special techniques.
It doesn't require special actions.
It doesn't require special words.
Prayer is just talking with God. Anyone can pray at any time anywhere anyhow.

Yet Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray. They realised that they could develop their prayer lives and were keen to learn from Jesus. And Jesus obliged. He taught them how to pray his way.

These seven devotions explore seven different approaches to prayer as taught or exemplified in Scripture. Each day we will learn from the experience or teaching of a different character or group in the Bible.

You will most likely cover more in seven days than you can effectively apply. Each day there is a short activity to help practise the type of prayer covered. But growing in prayer takes long-term exercise so you will need to be patient.

Hopefully, you will take one or two new prayer patterns or skills from these seven devotions into your regular prayer life. We can expect to grow as we say to Jesus, "Teach us to pray."

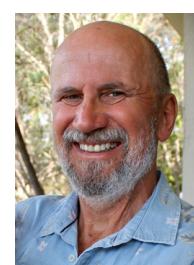
But if this teaching on prayer proves to be too complicated or challenging for you, then just keep praying anyway. Prayer is the main channel of our ongoing relationship with Jesus.

One of our priorities as Queensland Baptists is "Faith-filled Prayer." It is my prayer that over this week we will not only learn more about prayer but that a growing faith and expectation will infuse our prayers.



John Sweetman

Interim Director
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PRAYING LIKE JESUS

LEARNING FROM JESUS

The disciples were not pagans with no idea of what God wanted or how to pray to him. They were deeply religious Jewish boys. They knew the law and they knew how to pray. They had set prayers that they prayed each day. But there was something about the way Jesus prayed that was different. Maybe it was more natural. Maybe it was more spontaneous. Maybe it felt more powerful. Maybe it was more personal. Maybe it covered different issues. Whatever the attraction, the disciples wanted to pray like Jesus, and they asked him how to do it. Jesus response was important for them and it is equally important for us. We need to know how Jesus wants his followers to pray.

Reading: [Luke 11:1-4](#) (Just click on the link)

When I was growing up, we prayed the “Lord’s Prayer” very regularly. We prayed it on school parade. We prayed it in church services. We prayed it at Sunday school. We knew it off by heart and could repeat it easily. It was so deeply imprinted on my brain that 60 years later, I can still say the King James version of the “Lord’s Prayer.” We figured back then that if Jesus taught his disciples to pray this prayer, we should be praying it too. And we did. And it was helpful.

But maybe Jesus meant this prayer to be more a pattern of prayer rather than a model prayer. He was not giving his disciples words to repeat like they repeated their Jewish prayers, but was outlining the direction and design of his prayers so that they could follow this shape themselves. If this is the case, the Lord’s Prayer becomes more foundational. It’s not something that we pray and then we are done and can move on to other prayer points. It’s a prayer shape that pervades our prayer life. I’m not saying don’t repeat this prayer. By all means thoughtfully pray these Scriptures. But more importantly, let Jesus’ prayer pattern pervade your prayer life.

What does this look like? Well first **we pray for what blesses God** (11:2). We desperately pray for him to be honoured. We ask for his rule to expand. We appeal to God for people and communities to please him and follow him. We ask for his grace and power to be seen and his work to increase. We’re praying for God to do what he wants to do. It’s all about what pleases him. In doing this, we align our prayers with God’s heart. We grasp his deepest longings and we yearn for his glory. In this phase, our own concerns and needs become less important as we focus on God’s heart.

Then **we pray for what blesses us** (11:3). The three personal blessings Jesus mentions are our daily provision, our complete forgiveness, and our protection from temptation. That’s a start. This is the phase of prayer when we cry out to God for our personal needs and the needs of those we care for. We search for our deepest desires and his promises and humbly ask God for them.

Of course, these two phases of prayer overlap, but distinguishing them ensures that we focus on both. They are mutually important aspects of prayer.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Have a go at this Jesus pattern of prayer yourself.

Focus on God’s heart first and pray for all the things that you know will please him. Don’t hesitate to praise him as you pray for his honour and rule to grow. Try to focus on this for 5 minutes. Then spend the next 5 minutes praying fervently for your own desires and needs. Let them flow from your heart. Cover personal needs like forgiveness and protection as well as the needs of others. (If this approach to prayer is too challenging for you at this stage, pray the Lord’s Prayer, pausing between each phrase to reflect and intercede.)

PRAYING WHEN ANXIOUS

LEARNING FROM PAUL

In some ways we're better off than any other Australian generation. We have strong government support, more superannuation, better health care and greater access to our world (well we used to anyway). Yet anxiety is on the increase. Maybe it's our lack of fulfilment. Maybe it's the bombardment of bad news. Maybe it's our living under constant stress. Maybe it's our diminishing ability to cope with pressure. I'm not sure. But most of us struggle with touches of anxiety and some of us can be overwhelmed by anxiety. There is a lot of anxiety around at the moment. In Philippians 4, Paul, who had been stuck in prison for years and known his share of anxiety, outlines a pathway from anxiety to peace for followers of Jesus. Check it out. Prayer is the key.

Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

The first antidote to anxiety is **thanksgiving**. Paul says, "Always rejoice in the Lord" (4:4) and pray "with thanksgiving" (4:6). It is very hard to be really thankful to God and overwhelmed by worry at the same time. Praise and anxiety are opposites. So the more we rejoice in God and the more we thank God for his blessing, the more peace will flow into our hearts. Of course, the more we worry, the less we want to rejoice. So it's a choice we need to make. Paul says to "rejoice always" (4:4). And in case you missed it the first time, he repeats himself. This is not a call to think positively and try to ignore the facts. It's a call to appreciate all that Jesus has done for you and recognise his control and power and promises. It's a call to value the truth of the gospel. Rejoice - and watch that anxiety melt away.

The second antidote to anxiety is **presenting your requests to God** in prayer (4:6). There are some significant worries around the place at the moment. Our world is struggling with a pandemic. Many have lost jobs and income. Frustration has grown. Some are seeing too little or too much of family. Then we add in the other continuing worries like challenging children and struggling friends and family and difficult relationships and major disappointments. We really do face significant problems that naturally create anxiety for us. There is no escape. Paul knew that. Being stuck in a Roman prison was no walk in the park. But Paul says that you shouldn't carry those worries yourself but give them up to God through prayer (4:6). Ask him for what you would like and then leave him with the problem. God will be able to handle your difficulties a lot better than you, and he can actually do something about them.

And the result of praise and prayer? **Peace** (4:7). Real peace. God-type peace. The sort of peace that "guards" you and protects you from Satan's lies and the invading anxiety that creeps through and captures your mind and heart. This is what Jesus has bought for us on the cross. The right to peace. Deep peace. Heart-guarding peace. Peace is our special privilege through Jesus.

PRAYER PRACTICE

You don't want your prayer to be impacted and interrupted by anxiety. That's no way to pray with faith. So take some time today to recognise your anxieties – the surface ones and the deep ones. Hand them over to God and ask for what you would like to see him do in these situations. Then leave it all with him. He really can be trusted with your engulfing challenges. Now praise him for all that he's done and what he is doing. You will find your faith and expectancy growing.

PRAYING WHEN DESPERATE

LEARNING FROM DAVID

Israel's King David was a great leader who brought success and prosperity and godliness to Israel. He built Israel into a unified nation, he won many victories and expanded the kingdom, and he established Yahweh as Israel's sole God. Such success. Such achievement. So many accomplishments. David did incredibly well. Better than any king before or after him. But David's sensational attainments didn't mean that life was easy for him and that he got everything he wanted. Not so. Reading through the songs he wrote, you get the impression that he struggled a lot of the time. Perhaps more so than most of us. If anyone knew how to pray when life got tough, it was David. And in God's grace we have lots of his prayers in the Psalms. Let's look at one of them.

Reading: Psalm 13

It seems that David is struggling with a very serious illness in this song. One that is likely to take his life; much to the delight of all his enemies (13:4). He is desperately unwell and God seems to be doing nothing. How do you pray when everything seems to be falling apart? When you can see no hope? When God seems to be silent? If you haven't been there, you will be sometime. What can we learn from David about prayer in the darkest times? There are three parts to this prayer. I find it helpful to picture them in terms of prayer postures.

First, David is **on his face** - mourning and complaining (13:1-2). Yes you heard it right – complaining. I can't read these verses in any other way. But note that he's complaining to God, not about God. He's going right to the source. David figures that ultimately God controls sickness, so he is telling him how he feels. This is where desperate prayer starts. It begins with deep mourning that includes painful complaining. Jesus prayed a similar prayer on the cross: "My God why have you forsaken me." So it must be okay. Sometimes I hear people pretending they are fine when they aren't. They are ignoring their grief and pain. When we are despairing and distressed, we need to tell God. We owe it to him to be honest. It's difficult for God to do his work if we don't accept our need.

Second, David is **on his knees** – pleading (13:3-4). Now David is appealing for an answer. He's no longer wallowing in his pain but praying for God to work. He even gives God a reason to answer his prayers - if he dies, his enemies will get the wrong impression. David is making it very clear what he is asking for. He believes that God has promised him life and he's telling him that. This could be seen as a selfish prayer. There were probably many other desperate people in his kingdom at this time, so why pray for himself? But as long as we are willing to submit to what God wants (see 13:5-6), there are no selfish prayers, just honest, real, direct prayers.

Third, David is **on his feet** – rejoicing (13:5-6). David finishes his prayer by expressing his complete confidence in God. You get the impression that David is praising God for something that has not yet happened. This is what "faith-filled prayer" is all about. We rejoice in what we know God will do even though we cannot see it yet. This is not usually where desperate prayer starts, but it is always where it ends.

PRAYER PRACTICE

You may or may not feel desperate at the moment but choose an issue you are concerned about and try the three prayer postures if you can. If you can't do it physically, at least pray through the steps. Get familiar with them. You're going to need them.

PRAYING A BLESSING

LEARNING WITH AARON

I have been in many prayer meetings when the word "bless" is used liberally. We ask God to bless people and bless groups and bless activities. Sometimes I suspect that we are being lazy. It's easier to ask for a general blessing than to specify exactly what we are asking God to do. However, the idea of praying for a blessing from God for people is clearly biblical. But what would a blessing from God actually look like? What are we really praying for? Well God told Aaron to pronounce his blessing on Israel and he told Aaron exactly what to say. I'm think you've probably heard this "Aaronic blessing" before. So as we explore how we can pray for God's blessing on his people, maybe this blessing will help guide us? At least it will be a start.

Reading: Numbers 6:22-27

The original Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the Hebrew structure of this blessing gives us an insight that the English doesn't. It goes like this [where every bracket is a Hebrew word]:

- [Yahweh] [shall bless you] [and keep you].
- [Yahweh] [shall light up] [his face] [to you] [and shall be gracious to you].
- [Yahweh] [shall lift up] [his face] [to you] [and he shall give] [his peace] [to you].

You will notice how the blessing grows as it goes. It gets bigger and bigger. This structure is designed to show that while the blessing of God may appear to start small, it will no doubt increase. God loves to bless. Because all Christians are now priests like Aaron, it is our privilege to pass the blessing of God on to his people. We now get to pronounce God's ever-increasing blessing over people. And it's so true. The blessings of God's future for us are far greater than the wonderful blessings we have experienced so far. So let's get blessing. There is spiritual power in the statement of blessing.

But what does this blessing include? Well there are two pictures of God's action in this particular blessing. If you look at the translation of the Hebrew above, you will notice how similar they are: "God shall light us his face to you" and "God shall lift up his face to you." This blessing says that God's face (representing his attention and concern) will light up and lift up. Let me explain.

1. May God's face light up. We've all seen faces lighting up. Students on graduation day. People falling in love. Children when they see their parents. Grandparents when they see their grandkids. It's a sign of joy and pleasure and excitement. Do you realise that you light up God's face? He takes such pleasure in watching you and sharing your life. This is what we ask for those we pray for. The blessing of knowing that because of the cleansing of Jesus, they are beautiful. A delight to God. A deeply-loved child. A new creation.

2. May God's face lift up. There are mentions in Scripture of God hiding his face from rebellious people (e.g. Deut. 31:18). Well this is the exact opposite. God's face turns or lifts towards his people so that he can see their needs, hear their prayers, respond to their cries, watch over their lives, give them peace. Oh the delight of his watchful gaze and the resultant protection and peace. This is a blessing God longs to pour out on his children

Of course, there is a lot more to God's blessing than this, but it's a great start.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Think of a few people that you love deeply and pray this blessing for them. Let it flow from your heart. Maybe you might even be able to pronounce it over them in their presence?

PRAYING WITH FAITH

LEARNING FROM JAMES

Generally, we're wary of connecting faith too strongly with healing. Rightly so. I've seen people who are believing for a miracle become deeply disillusioned when it doesn't happen. I've seen dying people blamed for their lack of faith for complete healing. It's downright dangerous saying that God's powerful answers to prayer are dependent on our faith. This association leads to hypocrisy and guilt and disappointment. So you would think that Scripture would shy away from connecting faith and healing. Not so. James links them together in this passage. See what you think James is teaching about faith-filled prayer.

Reading: James 5:13-18

Like everyone else in Scripture, James emphasises the importance of prayer. "You've got a problem? Then pray about it" (5:13). In the previous chapter (4:2), James says that Christians spend so much time working and fighting for what they want when they should be asking God. So the context here is one of **constant prayer**. Not the occasional prayer for a miracle when nothing else seems to work and we're desperate. Faith-filled prayer is a lifestyle. We're constantly talking to God. Praising him when things go well and asking him what to do when we confront uncertainties (5:13). Only calling in the heavy artillery (elders) when we're making no headway (5:14). It's in this daily rhythm of prayer that deep faith in God is nourished.

But what actually is this "prayer of faith" (5:15)? Some people think that faith is believing without any doubt that God will do what we ask. That's way off the mark. Trying to manipulate God into doing what we want through our actions is called "sympathetic magic." It's the basis of pagan spirituality – bending the will of the gods by your actions. This is the opposite of faith. Faith is hearing and believing God and holding onto God's revelation and promises no matter what the circumstances. So faith always **starts with God speaking** not our hoping. Elijah is a great example as James points out (5:17-18). God told him when it would rain and when it wouldn't rain. No prophet of God would call these shots by himself. But then he prayed and prophesied in faith, whether he could see the rain clouds or not. And the results were miraculous and earth-shattering.

The third ingredient of faith-filled, powerful prayer according to James is **rightness with God** (5:16). There is no way that you will know what God wants if you're distant from him. He usually speaks in quiet whispers so if there is a lot of sin static in the way, you just can't distinguish God's voice. Prayer becomes a leap in the dark without any certainty of what God wants. Confession and repentance restore our relationship with God and open our hearts and minds to God's promises and desires. The result is faith-filled prayer.

So that's the secret to praying with faith. First, we pray and praise all the time so we become used to speaking with God and sharing his life. Second, we listen carefully to what God is saying and don't presume that he wants what we want. Sometimes of course we're not sure so we pray anyway. That's fine. God still hears us and may well answer. But it is not the prayer of faith that James is talking about here. Third, we stay right with God so we are close to his heart and his voice is clear and our prayers are heard. "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (5:16). Please note: this type of praying is for ordinary people (5:17) not spiritual giants.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Listen to what God is laying on your heart right now and pray with faith. If you don't hear God say anything, take a promise from Scripture and stand on it in prayer.

PRAYING FOR NEW MISSION

LEARNING FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

The church at Antioch was experiencing revival. God was working for the first time on a grand scale among Gentiles. This church provided a glimpse of God's future for his church. It had a strong leadership team with Barnabas as the senior pastor and a young guy named Saul as the youth pastor. (Well at least he's mentioned last in the list of the pastoral team in Acts 13:1, so I presume he's the youth pastor!!). But God's plans for this church were far bigger than they imagined. God was about to launch a mission from this local church that would change the world.

Reading: Acts 13:1-3

The mission that was launched that day was what we describe as "Paul's first missionary journey." It set the trajectory for Paul's lifetime work of taking the gospel to unreached places and planting churches all over the Roman world. The church may have felt some grief in sending off their key leaders, but the group had no doubt that God had spoken, and they obeyed immediately. God's mission was more important than their comfort or future. As we pray for God's kingdom to grow and as we seek a greater impact on our world, there are a few things we can learn from this church.

First, their leading from God did not come from a planning meeting but a **worship** session. It's not quite clear whether it was the whole church worshipping or just the leaders, but there is no doubt that God spoke unmistakably to them in the middle of their worship time. I'm big into planning. We are developing strategic plans for the QB Movement and for QB Services. We do need to be good stewards of our resources and to strategize well. But ultimately, it's the voice of God that we want to hear louder than helpful human wisdom, and this often happens when we are close to God's heart in worship and prayer. It probably would never have occurred to them to send out their best leaders, but when God spoke, they didn't hesitate, and the rest is history.

Second, **fasting** is mentioned twice in these three verses so it can't be ignored. God spoke to them while they were fasting and then they fasted some more before sending Barnabas and Paul out on mission. They must have been hungry by the time Barnabas and Paul left. But you get the impression that they regarded fasting as a key weapon in their spiritual journey. Personally, I find fasting difficult. I don't enjoy it. It's hard giving up things that I really like. I wouldn't do it, except that Scripture keeps mentioning it. Somehow fasting heightens our spiritual sensitivity and increases our spiritual authority, at least this is what the early church found.

Third, they **prayed** Barnabas and Paul's mission into life. Barnabas was an incredible man of God and Paul was a gifted leader and evangelist. But the success of their mission was not just dependent on the character and gifts of these men, but on the prayers of their church. The early church knew this. They covered these guys in prayer before they sent them off. Prayer has huge spiritual power.

There it is: **worship, fasting, prayer**.

The three fundamentals of new Spirit-empowered mission. At least that's what the early church found.

PRAYER PRACTICE

If your heart is for the powerful work of God in new mission then you probably do need to fast for it. It doesn't have to be food, but it does have to be costly. Make a plan right now to worship, fast and pray sometime soon. Maybe today. Praise God for his greatness and pray for God's new direction and power in mission.

PRAYING FOR REVIVAL

LEARNING WITH SOLOMON

Solomon started off his rule in Israel with a bang. He was everything God and his people wanted in a king – humble, godly, wise, capable, hard-worker, intelligent, gifted, peaceable, passionate. And so the list goes on. The fledgling nation of Israel was poised on the edge of a golden age and God had gifted them a brilliant king. Israel had the best and brightest leader in the world. But God knew that there would still be rocky times ahead. Humility would turn to pride, thankfulness would turn to arrogance, achievement would lead to independence. And consequently, God's approval and support and blessing would turn into God's disapproval and reprimand and abandonment. But God promised Solomon a way back for his people from this disastrous state of affairs when it occurred. He gave Solomon a pathway to renewal and revival that applies equally to God's church today.

Reading: 2 Chronicles 7:11-16

The main theme of this passage is God's attention to prayers in his new Temple. He loved the place and promised, "My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place" (7:15). Of course, we don't need to go to a temple or a church for God to specially hear our prayers because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. He loves our place. As we pray God is carefully watching and listening to us. He sees our heart. He hears our cries. God is not distant. We don't need to somehow break through to some remote realm. God is close and attentive and rapt with our prayers. He is "all ears." You don't have to pray loud or long or properly. You just have to ask.

But we are particularly looking for how to respond when people have rejected or ignored God and are living with the consequences of his abandonment. This is true of the West and Australia in particular. Such a strong foundation on Christian faith and morality. Such promise and potential. Such blessing from God. Yet we have become arrogant and self-dependent and materialistic and secular. We think that we have earned our blessing and have no need of God. But what can God's people do?

First, **humble ourselves**. We are part of the problem. These are our people and we identify with them. We too are broken. We too are materialistic. We too are self-dependent. We see the roots of our nation's arrogance and shame in our own lives. And this brings us to our knees. It's not us and them. We are in this together. We acknowledge that we are a sinful people who desperately need the grace and mercy of God. We will never get out of this by ourselves. It's the church that needs reviving before our nation will respond.

Second, **pray**. Not think about praying. Not say that we really should pray. Not leave it to the intercessors. But actually pray. Call out to God for his mercy. Ask for revival. Plead for another chance for ourselves, our friends and our people. Pray personally. Pray corporately. Pray when you're in public and pray when you're in private. It really doesn't have to stay like this. God wants so much more, but we have to ask. And ask.

There's more about seeking revival in this passage, but you will need to explore that for yourself.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Humble yourself. Identify with your people. And pray for revival and healing, starting with you.

PRAY WITH US TONIGHT

Please join us as Baptists all over our State pray for revival tonight.

SUNDAY JUNE 7 - 7.00PM - 8.00PM on [Zoom Meeting ID 923 0563 8197 Password 993728](#)

[CLICK HERE AT 7 PM](#)