

The Quick Start Guide  
to Improving Your Prayer Life

SECOND EDITION

Revised  
and  
Expanded

TIPS on

*prayer*

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**Tips On Prayer:**  
**A Quick Start Guide To Improving Your Prayer Life,**  
**2nd Edition, Revised and Expanded**  
**By Rev. John Arnold**

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In Christ's Love and Joy,

*Rev. John Arnold*  
*The Practical Disciple*

# Tips On Prayer

## The Quick Start Guide To Improving Your Prayer Life Now

### Introduction

Hello, I am John Arnold, author of the blog, [ThePracticalDisciple.com](http://ThePracticalDisciple.com). I help growth hungry Christians live out their faith in practical ways so they can follow Jesus Christ better, honor God more fully and experience the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. The heart of this work is training people to have a vibrant prayer life.

Have you ever struggled with what to say in prayer? Or, have you felt a huge disconnect with God, as if you were just talking into a void? Do you feel like you don't pray enough and God keeps getting shoved to the side? Have you ever wondered when praying, "Am I doing this 'right'?"

Me too. In fact, when I was in high school. I really wanted to learn how to pray but didn't have a clue what I should do. I found myself in a HUGE vacuum concerning any concrete practical instruction about prayer.

At home, prayer wasn't modeled. We didn't do bedtime prayers or give thanks at meals. I don't remember my parents ever talking about prayer or advising me to pray.

Church wasn't much help either. About my only model for prayer at church was the preacher's prayers on Sunday morning. Those seemed impossibly pretty and too polished for me to pull off.

We prayed during our youth group meeting at church. (I should say our youth leaders prayed.) But again, what they did seemed beyond my reach. I still didn't get what I should say when I pray, when I should pray, or even the importance of prayer and no one was really explaining any of this to me.

### So what did I do?

Don't laugh, but I started by looking up the Lord's Prayer in an encyclopedia and memorized it. For real. That's how I started. I didn't know what else to do and began what has become a life long quest to discover the keys to a vibrant prayer life.

I later came to realize that my experience (minus looking up the Lord's Prayer) wasn't an uncommon one. Numerous dedicated Christians grow up in the church with no one saying, "Okay, so this is how you pray..." As a result, hordes of people needlessly struggle to even know how to pray, let alone

experience prayer as the well-spring of peace, guidance, power, and ministry to others that it is.

## **Filling the Vacuum**

Cracking the cover of an encyclopedia nearly three decades ago didn't satisfy my hunger to connect with God. Over the years, I consumed book after book on prayer. I can't tell you how many hours I combed bookstore shelves looking for that ONE book that would be the magic key to unlock my prayer life. Many of those books helped, but they never quite had what I was looking for, so, I also sought lots of prayer experience.

In college, I participated in two prayer groups who on the surface were as diametrically opposite as you could imagine. One was a charismatic non-denominational group who, with rising hands and voices, launched staccato volleys of loud praises at God. The other was a Catholic student group who gathered weekly for contemplative prayer. They sat motionless in silence for seemingly endless periods of time with barely a detectable pulse. Truth be told, the Spirit of God was very at work in both groups and they both enriched my faith.

My experiences were not limited to those groups. I also went on retreats ranging from literally praying in monasteries with monks to fasting alone on a mountain top. Lastly, I spent many hours in solitude. Everywhere I've lived I have had a "secret spot" that I regularly visited. There I could hush many voices and listen for just one voice, God's voice. Those hours significantly shaped me and my relationship with God.

Out of all of this research, study and experience I have discovered the elusive magic key I sought—

### **Nothing can teach you more about prayer than praying.**

Consequently, rather than write a voluminous tome on prayer, I am offering you a guide that will jump start you into consistent and deeper prayer. God will do the rest.

You do not have to live in the void of instruction that I did. Nor do you have to endure all of my struggles. I have distilled and compiled the best practices and principles to rapidly and effectively open the door for you to life-changing prayer. In this 2<sup>nd</sup> edition I have added several new tips and have also added instruction on praying with small groups.

After the first edition release I began praying with three men on a weekly basis and rapidly realized that I had completely failed to address one of the richest opportunities for growing in prayer—praying with others. I have rectified that mistake in this edition and look forward to hearing about the amazing things

that will happen in your life if you begin praying with other people on a regular basis.

Lastly, prayer shouldn't be just an extra-curricular activity, but preparation for and a celebration of life. If prayer isn't changing your life, then it's time to change your prayer. So, with no further delay, let's get started.

## The 5 Pillars of Life-Changing Prayer

Five factors shape your prayer. Neglect them and they will be killers of your prayer life. Strategically develop them and they will be pillars of a dynamic and transformative prayer life. The choice is yours. The 5 Pillars of Life-Changing Prayer are:

**Consistency**—Do you struggle to make prayer a regular part of your day? Do you only go to God when life is hard? Consistency is absolutely critical for prayer to transform you. Imagine trying to improve your physical health by going to the gym only every couple of weeks. How consistent in prayer are you? Do you feel you need to pray more?

**Breadth**—Do you feel at a lost with what to say or feel trapped in ruts? For example do you ever say, “I am really good about thanking God, but seldom pray about anything else.” Or, “I feel like I am always asking for things.” How broad of a conversation do you have with God?

**Depth**—Do you feel distant from God or unaware of how God responds to your prayers? Specific practices can deepen your relationship with God and build your sense of spiritual awareness. Do you have a growing sense of intimacy with God? Do you readily recognize God at work?

**Focus**-- Sustaining attention is beyond a shadow of a doubt the MOST common problem people report having with prayer. I hear an epidemic lament, “I try to pray but my mind constantly wanders.” That is only getting worse as fast moving technology further compresses our attention span. How well can you stay focused during prayer?

**Integration**--The full value of prayer does not reveal itself until it starts shaping your daily life and becomes a natural response to life’s events. How much is prayer an integral part of your life? Does it inform what you do in the day? Is prayer shaping who you are, or just an extra-curricular activity?

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Considering these key factors, what are your personal strengths and weakness in your prayer life? How would you rate yourself on the five Pillars of Life-Changing Prayer? Write down the 5 pillars and next to each give yourself a rating of poor, fair, average, good, or excellent for each one. Keep these in mind as you read “Tips On Prayer”. I will be sharing with you specific practices to strengthen each pillar.



## Best Practices

### 1. Establish a Daily Devotional Time and Place

#### A Time

A vibrant prayer life begins with creating an intentional strategic plan. Prayer shouldn't be left to whenever and where ever. It's simply too critical. The heart of a prayerful life is having an unshakeable, life-giving daily devotional time. So, let's look at how to develop your daily devotional time.

Start by setting aside a time and place for prayer.

Your daily devotional time is a sacred time, a holy time, a time set apart from all other times, just for God. I suspect you schedule many other activities in your life. Set a time just as if this were an important appointment you couldn't miss. Why? Because it is. Scheduling time for God is one way to make prayer a priority.

Establishing a devotional time is usually the first big challenge that arises when a first-timer wants to increase their prayer life and connection with God. Many people are praying at the end of the day as they fall asleep. They may offer thanks for meals. Or, just flee to God when life gets so overwhelming that they feel they have no place else to go. That's great but...

**God is with you constantly and always giving you His very best, shouldn't you give God your best.**

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of having a set time and place; particularly, when you are starting out. When I surveyed my Through the Bible participants, I discovered that after 30 days, people with a set time and place for reading are five times more likely to at least still be reading. Those readers are also twice as likely to be on track with the schedule.

#### A Place

You can pray anywhere, but having a set place will increase your consistency dramatically and trigger you to be more focused in your prayer time. I am convinced that Jesus had places he prayed regularly. In the gospel of Luke when Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray, he did so, "as was his custom." Luke 22:39.

Also, in Luke 11:1 we are told he finished praying "in a certain place." This isn't definitive but seems to point toward Jesus having particular spots that he went to for prayer. For certain, Jesus withdrew to pray in solitude regularly.

Your prayer spot can be as simple as an arm chair in your living room. Or,

you may want a dedicated prayer closet. I actually have a couple of prayer spots.

For example, in my office I have a chair tucked in the corner. Next to it is an old safe that serves as a side table. Upon it is a lamp and a candle. The chair is in a blind spot that allows me a degree of privacy even if my door is open. If I want a greater sense of intimacy with God I close the door and turn the overhead lighting off and just use the lamp and a candle.

At home, I have a prayer closet. It's extremely small and simple. I emptied half of my clothes closet and separated the halves by thumb tacking up a piece of fabric as a curtain. I added a stool and mounted a small shelf on the wall for my bible, journal, a candle, a wooden cross and a match box. I absolutely love having this dedicated space and highly recommend you create a similar space.

In the past, I have also had an outdoor sit spot for prayer and I regularly used the prayer room at a hospital that was between my home and work. Just make sure that your space is one where you can be alone with God and uninterrupted. I leave my cell phone outside of my prayer closet. Do whatever you can to limit disruption and distraction.

I have known two different parents who prayed in their car after they dropped their children off at school. That was one of the few times when they could be alone with God. Keep in mind though if you choose a time closely related to a weekday routine, you will also need to come up with a "plan B" for weekends.

Once you have a set time and place, what should you actually do?

## **2. Establish a Devotional Routine**

You will want to establish a routine for your devotional time. At a minimum, a routine will help you create consistency and build your ability to focus--two critical pillars of life-changing prayer.

Of course one danger of a routine is that you could set yourself up to just be lifelessly going through the motions of prayer. That is certainly a possibility, but I am going to hand you two keys to insure that your routine feeds the vitality of your prayer life. Before I do so though, let's take a moment and look together at my current 7-step sequence as an example. I will unpack some of the parts of it later as well.

DISCLAIMER: Note, your prayer practice might be much simpler than what I am about to share. In fact, later in the book I will share multiple tried and true methods that are simpler. Nevertheless, I want you to see one typical way I do prayer and understand why I include the elements I do.

## **My 7-Step Sequence:**

**1. An Opening Action**--The first thing I do is enter my prayer closet and light a candle saying, "I light this candle as a reminder of Jesus Christ's presence with me." This action triggers my attention towards God and helps me transition my mind to a prayerful mindset.

**2. Pray for Understanding**--Immediately after, I pray for God to help me understand God's Word. It's very easy to rush into bible reading without praying. However, I find that prayer invariably helps me understand more.

**3. Read the Bible**--This is devotional reading, not necessarily study. Study involves lots of critical thinking and research. My devotional reading is more about meditatively soaking in the Word and listening for nudges from God. Sometimes God answers a prayer through His Word or instructs me.

**4. Journal**--My journaling takes on many forms. I may journal on my bible reading, use a prayer model or just write freely. I will cover the first two and give you some examples later in this quick start guide.

**5. Identify a Take-Away**--From both my prayer and bible reading I ALWAYS take something into my day. Usually, I identify an intention to keep or a specific task to do. When prayer begins to shape your to do list for the day, then it measurably starts transforming your life. Always look and listen for action steps that God is calling you to.

**6. Meditate and Listen**--Thinking of meditating and listening as an isolated step is a bit more forced than my practice. Meditating and listening are typically interspersed throughout my devotional time. I pause frequently as I read, write and pray. That said, I often pause near the end of my prayer time to simply be very quiet before God for several minutes.

When the scriptures speak about meditating, the word translated as "meditate" is the same verb used to describe a cow ruminating or chewing on its cud. In my devotional practice, meditation typically takes on one of two particular forms: meditating on the scriptures or meditating on who God is and what God has done.

**Meditating on the scriptures** simply involves pondering the Word of God. For example, you could simply sit with a word or phrase and wonder, or you could imagine being in a particular bible story by using all of your senses to vividly picture what it must have felt and been like to actually be in the story.

**Meditating on God** is a more difficult thing to express. I sit quietly before the Lord and contemplate the wonder and beauty of who God is and what God has done. Often times I am just quiet before God. Many other contemplative prayer methods I would categorize as meditating on God. The best metaphor I ever heard describing meditating on God's presence was that it is like a parent

going into a child's room at night and lovingly gazing upon their sleeping child.

**7. Thank God--**I end by thanking God for any insight God gave me and for the time together. You might find it helpful to have a closing action like saying the Lord's Prayer.

I *strategically* shift the elements of my prayer time periodically. However, I always include scripture, prayer and setting an intention for the day. In general, I keep a flow of:

1. Preparing to encounter God
2. Honoring God
3. Listening for God's Word to me
4. Discerning my response
5. Leaving with an intention in mind.

I have a 20 minute video presentation on exactly what I do each morning in my daily devotional life, You can view that video at:

<http://tipsonprayer.com/prayer-instruction-daily-devotional-time/>

## **Two Keys To Keeping a Prayer Routine Vital**

Imagine a baseball player showing up everyday for practice and training the same way each day and yet he is baffled by the fact that his performance isn't improving. Perhaps, he even knows that he needs to improve specific problems areas, such as, his batting average or work on his speed. Nevertheless, he never bothers to adjust his training.

If you aren't regularly evaluating and strategically adjusting your prayer life, then you are that player. Your prayer time is, among other things, a training ground for life. It's where God shapes you to perform better on the field. The two keys to insure your training stays vital and effective are evaluating regularly and strategic strength training.

**Key #1: Evaluate regularly.** Specifically, you need to evaluate two things: your discipleship and your prayer life.

Why discipleship? The first sign of a stagnant prayer life is stagnant growth as a disciple. Constantly be alert to how you are improving as a disciple. Just as an athlete should ask, "Am I performing better on the field?", you should ask yourself, "Am I more Christ-like in my daily living? Am I more kind to my children? ...Patient with my spouse? ...generous to those in need?", etc.

When it comes to evaluating your prayer life use the 5 Pillars of Prayer as your standard for evaluation, not your experience of prayer. You may find yourself wanting every prayer time to be a moving experience with a revelation from God. It's common for people to want to feel great as they pray and then think that somehow they are doing something wrong if they don't. That's not necessarily true. Sometimes the experience of prayer is wonderful, and sometimes times prayer is training which is hard work for which the value is only revealed on the field.

Imagine our same ball player showing up at practice and judging the practice by how great it felt. That's all fine and dandy, but if he isn't improving, how great of a practice was it really?

Again, regularly evaluate the elements of your prayer time in terms of the Five Pillars of Life-Changing Prayer: consistency, breadth, depth, focus and integration. Ask yourself, "On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the best, how would I rate myself on each of the 5 pillars of prayer?"

Which brings us to the second key to a vital routine...

**Key #2: Strategically Targeted Strength Training.** Strategically adapt your prayer life to strengthen the five pillars of life-changing prayer. This is where 99% of disciples are completely missing out. They have no criteria for evaluating and strengthening their prayer life, but you do now. And, as you read through this fast start guide you are learning specific tools to strengthen each of the pillars.

You don't have to target all five pillars at once. In fact, I would strongly advise you not to. By the time you finish this fast start guide you will know which practices best strengthen specific pillars. Select just one or two pillars that you want improve. Then, focus your energy on those practices that will strengthen those pillars.

For example, you will be learning how to use journaling and devotional guides to keep your mind engaged so you don't lose focus while praying. Those might be practices you adopt if focus is an issue for you.

You will want to be sure and adopt best practices for several weeks at a time before evaluating and adjusting again. Imagine our ball player deciding that he wants to increase his speed by adding sprints to his practice time. He does sprints twice and doesn't see any improvement, so he quits. Don't be like that ball player. Give a routine or best practice time to work before giving up on it.

Specifically, I would recommend giving a new practice at least 30 days before moving on. Typically, there is a learning curve period on any new practice and some slight adjustments need to be made for you to get a practice right. Even then, the benefits may not be apparent for much longer. You must

persevere to profit from your practice.

### 3. Include Scripture

Great men and women of faith invariably spend significant time in God's Word. Reading the Word and praying go hand in hand. Here are just some of the many reasons you should read scripture as part of your devotional time.

**God will answer your prayers through scripture.** Often times I am struggling to answer a question, understand a truth, or make a decision and then God speaks through the Bible and gives me just what I need. The answer comes as a story that parallels my circumstances or perhaps even just a phrase.

**Scripture will train you to recognize truth.** A thought may come to you during prayer and you may wonder, "Is this God speaking to me or just my own bright idea?" Or, you might wonder if some circumstance or event is God's activity in your life. Knowing the Bible will help you evaluate whether or not these things are consistent with who God is and what God does. At the very least, if something contradicts scripture, then you can be assured that it is not from God.

**Scripture is loaded with examples of how to pray.** From Moses to Mary we get to peek in on the prayer life of faithful men and women of the Bible. The Psalms in particular are a treasure trove of prayers. These prayers can be great instructors. For example, almost everything I have learned about praise has been from reading the psalms. Also, reading Paul's prayers both taught and challenged me to be interceding for people's spiritual maturity.

Here are some examples of great prayers in the Bible:

- David's prayer of repentance, Psalm 51
- Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving, 1 Samuel 2:1-10
- Habbakuk's prayer of praise, Habbakuk 3:2-19
- Ezra's intercession because of the guilt of his people, Ezra 9:9-15
- The Song of Mary (The Magnificat), Luke 1:46-55
- The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13
- Jesus' prayer for the disciples, John 17:1-26
- Paul's prayer for spiritual growth for the Ephesians, Ephesians 3:14-21
- Jude's prayer of praise, Jude 1:24-25

**Scripture will feed your prayers.** As you learn and grow from reading the Bible, it shapes your prayer life. For example, one day I read a number of passages in proverbs about using our tongues wisely. I wrote the following prayer that day:

*“Help me to have self-discipline of the tongue. I think that begins with discipline of the mind and heart. Lord, I will reject and resist any fruitless conversation that fills my head, embitters my heart, disturbs my sleep, or provokes anger within me. In these things there is no value.”*

## **How To Include Scripture**

You may be thinking, “Okay, I get that scripture should be a part of my devotional time, but how should I include it?”

**One option is to use a daily devotional guide that includes scripture.** Numerous guides incorporate scripture. The draw back to this approach is that often you are only given a verse or two to reflect on and they don’t necessarily relate to one another from day to day. It can be a rather scattered encounter with scripture. And really that’s okay.

Devotional reading is more about pondering a text and listening for how it might apply to your life. It’s not about covering a lot of ground. Nor is it necessarily study. I refer to my devotional reading as formational reading; whereas, study time is more informational reading. These approaches aren’t (nor should they be) mutually exclusive.

The flip side to getting scripture as part of a daily devotional guide is that you receive the enriching experience of seeing scripture through someone else’s eyes. I find that many times an author will push you to look at a scripture in ways you never considered.

**Another option is to adopt a systematic bible reading plan,** like The Practical Disciple Through the Bible in a Year program. You can find many programs online. I have several on The Practical Disciple resource page, <http://thepracticaldisciple.com/resources>, from which you can choose. Just be careful to select a realistic amount. Understanding and acting upon a handful of verses is better for you than not reading because you tried to read too much.

Whatever method you select for including scripture will almost certainly enhance your prayer life. The key is taking time to ponder what you read.

## **4. Use a Prayer Method**

The number one complaint people voice about prayer is, “I can’t stay focused. My mind wanders.” I call it monkey mind, your thoughts just keep swinging non-stop from one distraction to another. You can eliminate monkey mind.

In fact, you are well on your way. Picking a time, a place and establishing a routine, (when maintained regularly) all signal your mind to focus on prayer. A routine conditions your mind’s ability to focus.

But how do you stay focused during your prayer time?

ENGAGEMENT is the key. You can engage yourself both mentally and physically in prayer. In short, you need to toss your monkey some bananas to keep it focused.

### **Mentally Engaging**

Prayer models and devotional guides tangibly prompt focus. A prayer model pushes you to change the intentions of your prayers in an orderly manner. Each shift re-engages your mind. Similarly, a devotional guide serves as a concrete focus for your attention.

Here are three of my favorite prayer methods:

## **ACTS Prayer**

Acts is an acronym that stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. This is a great model for someone seeking to broaden their prayer life.

### **Adoration**

When I first started using this model I struggled with adoration. I was always shifting into thanks and realized that they are not the same thing. Don't believe me? Look someone in the face and tell them "Thank you." Now tell them, "I love you." I guarantee you will feel those are very different exchanges.

My struggle ended when I discovered a simple three-fold pattern of praise while reading Psalm 18, which consists of:

- 1) Say, "I love You."
- 2) Honor God for who God is.
- 3) Honor God for what God does.

David began Psalm 18 saying, *"I love you, O Lord, my strength."* I couldn't think of a time when I simply said to God, "I love you." I began starting all of my prayers with "I love you." Just that one shift in my prayer life created an enormous change; specifically, a growing sense of intimacy with God.

Next, I noticed David frequently acknowledging who God is. Consider these examples:

*"The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. His is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." Psalm 18:2*

*"The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear. The Lord is*



*the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” Psalm 27:1*

David also extols God for what God does... For example,

*“He reached down from on high and took hold of me. He drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the Lord was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.” Psalm 18:16-19*

If you are struggling to find praise words start by listing below who God is to you. For example, God is: The King of Kings, eternal, compassionate, loving, forgiving, merciful, omnipotent, and patient. What words come to mind for you?

God is...\_\_\_\_\_

List what you have seen God do. For example, *“You gave me strength, rest, peace, an amazing family. You provided for me. You healed a friend. You opened a door.”* I find this even more powerful if I keep it in a present tense, i.e. *“You give me strength, rest, peace. You provide for me. You forgive all of my sins.”*

\_\_\_\_\_

Now begin praying by saying , “I love you” and use your words to adore God for who God is and what God does.

Here is a short example:

*I love You Lord. I praise You for You are holy, righteous and mighty. You are the king of all creation, maker of the heavens and the earth. You alone, O Lord, are worthy of praise. I praise you for being generous and compassionate. You have given me far more than I need and have watched over me through some pretty tough times lately. Even when I have made poor choices you have been there to help me through. You have forgiven me when I have not trusted you. For your limitless mercy I praise you. Amen.*

### **Confession**

Extolling the goodness of God through adoration can be humbling. I am reminded of my sins. So I move from adoration into confession. When you confess specific sins, don't hide behind generic confessions such as, “I haven't been as loving as I should be.” Get real with God, i.e. “God I have been avoiding Janet because I am angry with her. Forgive me for pushing her to the side so that I don't have to deal with my anger. It is sinful for me to not give her the grace I have received.”

Being specific will help you change. Notice in the example that I actively

acknowledged my action as sin and why it is wrong. Honestly and boldly processing specific actions can propel you into change, but you only get there by being specific. To learn more about confession read the post, [Eradicating Spiritual Virus](http://thepracticaldisciple.com/2008/08/eradicating-spiritual-virus.html) at <http://thepracticaldisciple.com/2008/08/eradicating-spiritual-virus.html>.

## **Thanksgiving**

I won't say much about thanks because most of us readily know how to say thank you and what gratitude is. I do want to point out two things. First, my experience has been that including thanks in my prayer model forces me to consider what I am grateful for on the days I feel less than grateful. Paul told the Colossians,

*“And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:17)*

Second, I actively give thanks for the whole of creation. I don't only focus on the people and circumstance of my life. I give thanks for the earth, the plants, the trees, the animals, the birds, the stars, the sun, and the moon and all of these amazing pieces of creation that God has intricately woven together to make life possible.

## **Supplication**

To supplicate simply means to ask. At this point in your prayer, pour out your heartfelt concerns to God. Pray for friends, family, community, situations and yourself. Pray for whatever concerns you.

Take time to intercede for others. I used to think that intercession just meant praying for someone else in general. However, scripturally speaking, intercession almost always refers to praying for someone's spiritual well-being.

Advanced Tip: Adopting someone to pray for daily, either for a set period of time or until you see God's response, can be a powerful discipline. I know a young woman who selects someone every year on January 1st to pray for daily for the entire year. Inspired by her example, I chose to prayer for three young girls for a year when their parents unexpectedly died in a tragic plane crash. This discipline profoundly shaped my understanding and experience of what it means to be invested in praying for someone. A year may seem insanely long. If so, try adopting someone for a month, Summer, or some other extended period.

## **Five Finger Prayer**

There are a number of variations on the Five Finger Prayer. I am sharing with you the most common. This is a great tool to broaden the content of your prayers or to mentor children in praying for others. Using your hand as a mnemonic aid, pray for the following five groups of people:

**Thumb (people who are close to you)** Praise God for placing people in your life as a blessing. Lift up those close to you who need prayer. Pray for your family and friends.

**Pointer (people who point the way)** God often guides us through other people. Give thanks for these people and also ask God to protect, provide for and bless them. Pray for teachers, mentors, parents, and other people who encourage or influence you.

**Tall Finger (people in authority)** Pray for God's guidance of those who are in positions of authority. Ask for God's Holy Spirit to lead all that they say and do. Pray for government officials, pastors, people in the military, etc.

**Ring Finger (people who are weak)** This is your weakest finger. Prayer for strength and healing of those who are sick. Pray for the poor and the oppressed. Pray for the hungry and the homeless.

**Little Finger (your own needs)** Out of humility put others first in your prayer life, but do make your requests known to God with thanks in Jesus Christ. Especially, pray for God to help you grow in the Spirit that you might better follow Jesus Christ.

### **Five Finger Mistakes To Avoid**

My two greatest mistakes in praying for others are first, not fully considering a person's spiritual needs, as well as, their physical needs. For example, consider Paul's prayer for the Colossians:

*And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:9-14)*

Now consider your own prayers for other people. How often do you pray something akin to Paul's prayer for someone else? Asking myself that question humbled me and awakened me to a deficit in my prayer life. (Note once again how scripture can teach you to pray.)

My second great mistake is simply moving too quickly over my prayers for others. Are you prone to one sentence prayers, i.e. "Lord please, heal Margaret."

or “I am grateful for Robert.” Try lingering over people in prayer. One way to make yourself pause is to picture people vividly. Doing so will cause you to consider more fully their needs. Don’t be surprised if this practice begins to transform your relationships.

## The Examen

The Examen is an extremely old prayer practice attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola in the 1500’s. This practice particularly strengthens the Life-Changing Prayer Pillars of depth and integration. Here is how to do it.

**Recall that you are in God’s presence.** You are always in God’s presence and God is perpetually speaking to you. God speaks through the beauty of nature, friends, family members and even strangers. God also teaches you through the Holy Spirit. Take a moment when you begin praying to remind yourself that God is present and has a passion for being in relationship with you.

**Spend a moment looking over the activities of the day with gratitude.** Take an inventory of your day. Recall simple pleasures and revisit concrete moments. Pay attention to all of your senses when recalling specific moments.

Think also of more permanent blessings like health, family, work, the place you live, opportunities that you have been given. Consider God’s gifts throughout the day. Recall moments to forgive, love, and live. Clearly fix these images in your mind and lift them up to God with deep gratitude.

**Ask God to send His Holy Spirit to help you look at your actions and attitudes and motives with honesty and patience.** Part of the role of the Holy Spirit is to teach us. The Holy Spirit is a gift that will give you a deepening knowledge of yourself and your relationship to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you that knowledge. Ask for the freedom to look on your actions with grace that you might learn from them and grow more Christ-like.

**Now review your day.** This step is different from number two in that you aren't simply recalling the activities of the day, but you are giving them a review. This step is more of an analysis than an inventory. Examine the internal movements and motivations that occurred within the activity of the day. Who did you talk to, why and how? What did you do? Why did you choose that and how did you behave? When and where did a faithful response motivate your desires?

Consider when and where Christ and the Word influenced choices you made. What other influences motivated your actions? If you had any spiritual goals or intentions for the day, did you do them?

The more you examine yourself this way, the more clearly you will discern between your spirit and God’s Spirit. Listen for God to speak, convict, encourage, comfort and challenge you. God is daily inviting you to love Him with all your

strength, mind and soul, and your neighbor as yourself. This practice hones your ability to hear and heed God's call.

**The final step is a heart-to-heart talk with Jesus.** Now that you have thoroughly considered the day from a faith-filled perspective, discuss your day in prayer with Christ. Ask forgiveness for sins you committed. Ask for strength to change and for God to pour forth the Spirit and soften your heart. Thank God for grace throughout your day. Praise God for blessings, guidance and interventions. Resolve to move forward in whatever action God directs you. You may want to conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

Lastly, when adopting any new prayer discipline like one of these three models, stick to it for several weeks before judging the merits of the practice. You may spend your entire first week (or more) just getting comfortable with the model. I highly recommend living into a practice for a minimum of thirty days.

## 5. Journal

Including writing in your prayer practice will engage you both mentally and physically making it almost impossible for your mind to wander. You will experience a multitude of other benefits as well.

When I first established a daily devotional time it only consisted of reading the bible and then writing down the following items:

- Date, Text and subject
- First Impressions
- What I think it meant to the original audience
- What it means to me
- A question I have
- Right now I think God wants me to...
- A prayer

In the beginning this was my entire devotional time. Following a bible reading plan, I read a passage for the day and wrote about what I read. I didn't write a thesis either. My journaling was seldom more than a page or two. Though my journaling practice was extremely simplistic, it perpetually stoked the fire of my faith.

The two pieces that most fanned the flames were: "A question I have" and "Right now I think God wants me to..."

Recording your questions will stretch you. It forces you to penetrate the surface of the text and find the edges of your understanding. Each question creates a bit of surface area for future insights to adhere to. You will be amazed

at how often God answers those questions in future readings.

Completing the sentence “Right now I think God wants me to...” actually pushes you to apply what you read. When I first started I had no idea how powerful this one simple exercise is. Each completed sentence is a miniature spiritual goal propelling you toward gradual but perpetual growth.

Often my responses were not grandiose actions. Some were as simple as, “Send Jenny a note to encourage her.” or “Keep a positive attitude and trust in Him throughout the day.” The cumulative effect though of all of these Godly actions transformed me.

I now try to be more specific in my intentions. Specificity drives action.

Journaling DEFINITELY transformed my life, as it directly fed daily decisions. To be honest, though, prayer was not a prevalent piece of the puzzle. Prayer was something tagged on at the end with no form or little intention to it. I was still extremely ignorant of either how to pray or the value of the pray at the time I followed this practice.

This devotional model is sound and will yield change in your life, but you can have a much more powerful experience than I did by integrating one of the suggested prayer methods with it.

If you are just starting out you may find that journaling on a bible passage PLUS one of the prayer methods may be a burdensome commitment. That’s okay. Choose to do whatever you will do with consistency. You can always build upon that foundation later as your desire grows. (And trust me--it will grow.)

## **Additional journaling practices**

**Keep a prayer list**--During or after your prayer time, list concerns or people you are praying for and review the lists daily. You will experience two tremendous benefits from keeping a prayer list. First, you will more faithfully fulfill prayer requests. Second, your awareness of God increases because you pay closer attention to how God is responding.

Some people find it helpful to pray for certain lists on particular days. For example, praying for missionaries and clergy on Mondays, praying for family and friends on Tuesdays, etc. They find that the structure creates a beneficial weekly rhythm of prayer.

**Carry a prayer catch**--Have you ever told someone you would pray for her and then forget? I hate the guilt that washes over you the next time you see them and remember. You can eliminate this from ever happening again by keeping your prayer list in a small pocket sized notebook or on your phone. Personally, I don’t use my phone because I turn it off during prayer times and I don’t bring it in my prayer closet.

I refer to my little notebook as my “prayer catch” because it allows me to catch all of the things I would like to pray about, but often times forget.

**Keep a prayer diary**--A prayer diary can be a written collection of your prayers and/or prayerful reflection on what is going on in your spiritual life. Reflecting on your prayer life and how you see God moving can be an extremely powerful catalyst for spiritual growth. Keeping a prayer diary also allows you to look back. You can pump up the volume on these benefits by recording God’s answers to prayer. Furthermore, when you record an answer to prayer be sure and take a moment to also note your gratitude.

Reviewing your prayers weeks, months or sometimes even years later can yield amazing insights. Personal patterns both good and bad emerge. God’s activity that we couldn’t see in the moment becomes crystal clear. Spiritual progress is also often revealed.

Regardless of the form, writing forces clarity, engagement, and awareness. Experiment with it as an active part of your prayer life and you will not regret the effort.

## **6. Pray Aloud**

I used to try to redeem long drive times as prayer time, but couldn’t stay focused for even a few minutes. That was true until I struck upon the simple solution of praying aloud. Praying aloud physically engages you in prayer and makes it virtually impossible for your mind to wander. Needless, to say it is rather obvious that you have stopped praying when your mouth stops moving.

Singing is a great variation on praying aloud. One reader of my blog [www.ThePracticalDisciple.com](http://www.ThePracticalDisciple.com), Jim Lynn, commented on the ACTS prayer model, “I have found that singing worshipful hymns and songs helps tune my heart to adoration. As I begin using the ACTS method of prayer this helps me focus on God's worthiness and attributes.” Note the word “focus.” The focus comes from being both physically and mentally engaged.

Another side benefit of praying aloud in your private prayers is that doing so typically raises your comfort level with praying aloud in groups. Praying aloud in a group is an ENORMOUS common fear. If you have this fear, praying aloud during your devotional time is a great first step to help you through it.

## **7. Pick a Posture**

Another way to be more focused is to physically engage in prayer by intentionally selecting a prayer posture. Some traditional postures for prayer include: Standing with hands raised, head up and eyes open. This is particularly common for prayers of praise. Standing or seated with head bowed and eyes closed is common for interceding, confessing or meditating. Kneeling is common

in many traditions, so much so, that some churches have kneelers built into their pews. To lay prostrate on the floor is also a very old posture of prayer. And David even danced before the Lord. Each of these is alluded to or spoken about directly in scripture.

Personally, when I am quiet and listening before God, I often sit with my hands in my lap, open and facing upward. It's just a physical way for me to symbolically say, "God I am open and waiting to receive whatever you bring to me." Occasionally, I kneel. Whatever, the case may be I find that when I intentionally pick a posture for prayer I am far less likely to mentally check out from what I am doing.

## 8. Use a Devotional Guide

I had mentioned using a devotional guide earlier as a means for including scripture in your daily devotional. Guides are also great for engaging your mind by pushing you to think about passages in ways you wouldn't, and sometimes they even have application suggestions. Furthermore, physically having a guide in front of you gives you a tangible point of focus to constantly draw your attention back to prayer.

Devotional guides come in all kinds of shapes and sizes. Here are a few of my favorites.

### Subscription Devotionals

**"These Days"** (<http://www.ppcbooks.com/thesedays.asp>) is an inexpensive quarterly devotional guide that has comforted and instructed believers for over 35 years. Each daily devotional includes a scripture, reflection and action step. It only takes a few minutes to read and contains suggestions for using the devotions, plus, space for creating individual prayer lists. You can check out a sample on their website. These days is only available as a printed hardcopy.

**"Upper Room"** (<http://devotional.upperroom.org/>) is similar to These Days, but offers a much broader range of options for receiving it. You can get the Upper Room in print, receive it by email, or read it online. Upper Room actually publishes email editions for 8 different regions of the world. If you are interested in it you can view an entire sample issue on line or read it daily online.

One thing I like about the Upper Room is that it lays out a complete devotional model for you at the front of the guide. The elements are:

Settle into prayer

A scripture passage for the day

Stories to ponder

A prayer



A thought for the day,  
A 'link2life' (this is an application idea)  
And suggestions for small groups using the devotional

“**Our Daily Bread**” ([http:// odb.org](http://odb.org)) has been around since 1956 and is now available via print, large-print, radio, podcast, email, rss, and mobile. You can also find them on facebook and twitter. The email link will also give you access to four other great devotionals via the web: My Utmost for His Highest, Strength for the Journey, Been Thinking About, and Our Daily Bread.

If you are tech savvy or want access on the go, these options can be readily accessed from your computer, tablet, or phone. The actual daily devotional for Our Daily Bread isn't quite as well-rounded as the Upper Room or These Days. Basically, you get a passage to read, a selected biblical quote and an illustrative reading. One distinct feature of our daily bread is that it offers a Bible in a year option for the daily scripture lesson.

## **Devotional Books**

Any Christian bookstore and most secular bookstores offer innumerable devotional guides. There our general guides like [My Utmost for His Highest](#), a classic by Oswald Chambers, or specialty guides that cover specific topics ranging from being pregnant to the names of God. (Seriously, there is a devotional guide for pregnant women.) If you select a devotional guide centered around a personal topic of interest, the guide will more readily anchor your focus.

I have a preference for classic guides that have stood the test of time, guides such as, “My Utmost for His Highest” and “Streams in the Desert”. Specialty guides though have some advantages. They inherently capture your interest and are more readily applicable to your life because they are written about subject matter in which you are already interested.

“The Diary of Private Prayer” by John Baillie is perhaps, my personal favorite devotional guide for strengthening my prayer life. Why? The book is laid out with morning and evening prayers every day for a month and the opposing page is left blank for you to write your own prayers. Baillie prays for so many concerns that don't normally come to mind for me. Following his lead has added tremendous breadth and depth to my prayer life. Also, writing my own prayers directly in the book engages me mentally and physically. Once again, it's the writing of your own prayers that makes this such an effective tool.

## **Online Devotional Guides**

I have mentioned a few subscription guides above that offer online options. You can find a host of other devotions online by simply placing the words “online devotions” in any search engine. For example, one of my favorite online

specialty devotions is a free devotional I get emailed daily that is a combination of spiritual and physical fitness tips. The devotional is published at <http://Prayfit.com>.

## 9. Imitate Great Prayers

Much of what we learn in life is by imitating what we see others doing. In fact, the Apostle Paul, urged the Corinthians to “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 11:1 While Paul was speaking about his overall discipleship his exhortation to imitate is equally valid for prayer.

A very simple way to imitate another person’s prayers is to write a paraphrase. “The Diary of Private Prayer”, mentioned above is a perfect tool for this since the book actually includes writing space for your own prayers. The key is to use whatever devotional guide you are reading as a rubric for your own prayer.

If you don’t use a devotional guide try rewriting some of the Psalms in your own words. You will find yourself pushed to pray in ways you normally wouldn’t and drawn into greater focus.

Be aware though that the best prayers are from the heart. It’s not about how pretty a prayer is structured or how elegant the wording is. When I suggest that you imitate someone’s prayers the goal isn’t so much that you can pull off the same prayer performance. Instead, you’re listening for ways of praying that may be lacking in your prayer life. Then incorporate time in your prayer life for those types of prayer.

For example, one of my most poignant epiphanies from scripture regarding prayer was the need to spend more time spiritually interceding for people. I read Paul’s words to the Colossians,

*“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” Colossians 1:9-12*

I realized as I read Paul’s words that I spent a great deal of time praying about physical needs; particularly, prayers for physical healing. However, I was extremely negligent in praying about the spiritual well-being of my friends, family and congregation. His example transformed a critical aspect of my prayer life.

## 10. Identify a G.I.F.T.

At this point, you've set a time, place and practice to give you consistency. You've incorporated scripture and are utilizing a prayer method, devotional guide, or journaling. These resources keep you mentally focused, broaden your prayer vocabulary, deepen your relationship with God and help you mature in your faith. So now what?

Here's the KEY to making your devotional time a life-changing experience. It's where most disciples make a huge mistake. **Never walk away from your prayer time without some intention for taking Godly action.** You have to discern conscious connect points with your daily life when you pray and read scripture. Always have an action plan, no matter how small the action may be. Do this and prayer becomes life-changing.

Every time I walk out of my prayer closet I do so holding a G.I.F.T. (Godly Intention For Today) and these GIFT's are typically one of three things:

**A task to accomplish.** For example, visiting someone in the hospital, volunteering for Vacation Bible School, or helping a neighbor.

**A change to make.** For example, not being judgmental, letting go of a sinful habit, or letting go of a sinful mindset.

**A life lesson to live.** Such as, treating your neighbor as yourself, declaring God's mighty deeds, or confessing your sins daily.

Earlier I shared one very easy way for you to identify a GIFT by simply completing the sentence, "Right now I believe that God wants me to..." Every time you complete that sentence you are setting a spiritual goal of obedience. Complete those goals consistently day after day and the cumulative effect will astound you. You will soon become a very different disciple.

Your devotional time shouldn't be kept in a box. Prayer is preparation for and a celebration of life. However, my experience has been until you are intentional about translating your prayer life into action it remains largely impotent.

If you really want to supercharge your chances for successful acting on your intentions write down your GIFT and make it as specific as possible and perhaps even record three ways you can fulfill it. You are much more likely to act upon it if it is written and actionable.

For example, I have a hard time staying focused on things until completion. Jesus tells us, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." Luke 9:62. I really want to nurture a steadfast spirit of self-discipline so this morning I wrote in my prayer journal:

*My G.I.F.T.--To stay the course. To keep my hand to the plow.*

*How I shall give it:*

- *Complete the Fast Start Guide to Life-Changing Prayer today.*
- *Eliminate 3 unfinished tasks I have been resisting*
- *Clean my office and home to eliminate distraction*

Try coming up with your own G.I.F.T. right now. Pause and think about something that you believe would honor or please God and fill in the blanks below.

My G.I.F.T. is: \_\_\_\_\_

The three ways that I will give this GIFT today are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

That wasn't so hard...was it? Imagine how your life might change if you did this everyday and followed through on your G.I.F.T.S.

## **11. Use “triggers” To Insure Acting Upon Intentions**

How many unrealized great intentions have you had? Probably more than you care to admit. You can optimize your chances for success with a simple trick that oddly few people seem to know. Set up “triggers” to remind you to act. What is a trigger? It is an action or object to remind you of your intention.

I write intentions on my bathroom mirror with a dry erase marker. Seeing it every morning and evening reminds me to act. You can also select common actions as triggers. For example, when I am memorizing scripture I use reaching in my pocket for my keys as a trigger. I repeat the scripture each time I do so. Carrying something like a pocket cross, wearing a piece of jewelry or placing your watch on your opposite wrist can also interrupt your awareness enough to make you mindful of your intention.

Triggers are especially helpful when changing a mindset or ongoing behavior, IF you use your thoughts or behavior as a trigger to act differently. For example, I deeply resented a man who was perpetually bad mouthing me behind my back, but would smile and flatter me when he saw me. I struggled with

forgiving him and not hating him. To change my mindset I started praying God's best for him whenever I either saw him or found myself ruminating negatively about him. I would have never let go of my anger without using this trigger. The trigger led me to prayer where God softened my heart.

Without triggers I find that it is easy to be mindful of something in my prayer closet and then completely forget it until I go back to my journal. Remembering that I failed to act is discouraging and demoralizing.

### **Prayer Alarms**

If all else fails set a prayer alarm. Earlier I mentioned praying daily for three young girls whose parents had died in a plane crash. When I began that discipline I set an alarm on my cell phone that reminded me to pray for them.

I picked a meaningful time--3:00 p.m.. I frequently saw their mother Anne at that time when we were both picking up our children from school. I also liked that time because I could picture what the kid's were likely doing. And, from a practical stand point, I was usually in my car by myself headed to pick-up my own children and was free to pray.

I didn't need the prayer alarm for very long. Soon praying for the girls in the afternoon as I drove to the school became a norm that required no prompting. Later, I began to spontaneously pray for them during the course of the day, often more than once.

## **12. Create "Prayer Points" By Linking Prayer To Common Tasks**

Your daily devotional time is a foundation of prayer, but you shouldn't limit prayer to ONLY your devotional time. Once you have it in place, start working on making prayer a regular part of your day in other areas.

For example, each morning (even before I get out of bed) I declare to God and myself, "I greet this day with joy, for I am blessed. Lord may I be a part of what you have in mind for today."

A friend of mine who managed a storage rental facility would pray every night as he walked the grounds and locked up. He thanked God for the many blessings in his life and prayed the prayer of Jabez.--*"Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!" 1 Chronicles 4:-10*

Meals, coming and going from home, waking up, laying down, working out, getting your children off to school, showering, dressing in the morning, even mundane chores can all be prayer points in your life.

I call these 'prayer points' because they remind me of look out points along

highways. Where I live in Arkansas along certain highways in the mountains there are wide spots in the road where you can park and take in the scenery. Most people speed by. Common tasks can be like those wide points. You don't have to speed by. Instead, transform your common daily tasks into look out points for soaking in God's presence simply by linking prayer to those tasks.

In fact, doing these things can essentially become prayer. I first realized this as I was mowing my lawn. The day was scorching hot. My attitude was terrible and I was begrudging the fact that I "had" to mow my lawn. The thought struck me, "Do you realize how blessed you are to even have a lawn? Having a lawn means you own your own home. What an enormous blessing in a world where millions of people in the world don't own property or are homeless. You don't "have" to mow a lawn, you "get" to mow a lawn. You are richly blessed. And here you are complaining because you have to maintain the blessing."

Oh...wow...what was I thinking? I began to praise God that I had a lawn to mow and something shifted inside of me to the point that mowing the lawn became my joyful and grateful response for having so much. At that point, mowing became a prayer.

I have since worked at bringing that same reverent mindset to other chores, such as, polishing furniture, folding clothes, washing dishes, etc. Doing so transforms feeling burdened into knowing you are blessed. Perhaps this is why Paul wrote to the Colossians *"Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."* (Colossians 3:17) Also, perhaps this is how we are able to *"Pray without ceasing."* (1 Thessalonians 5:17) as Paul also wrote.

Remember, this practice of linking prayer to daily tasks is really a two stage process. First, use normative activities as a trigger for praying beyond the walls of your devotional time. Second, learn to live out those tasks with a heart full of gratitude, so the activity itself becomes your thankful response to God.

### **13. Redeem Unexpected Pauses**

How often do you find yourself "placed on pause by life?" What do I mean by "placed on pause"? I am talking about all of those times where you have an agenda, but life says, "Sorry, you're stuck here for the moment." For example, standing in line at a store, stuck in traffic, sitting in a waiting room, idling in a drive-thru at a fast food restaurant, patiently (or not so patiently) waiting for your spouse or kids to finish getting ready, or trapped in a layover at an airport.

For most people these unintended sojourns of time are a source of frustration. However, these are great opportunities to pray. I met a monk once who creatively used his bus commute into Boston as a prayer time. He would actually pray for individual passengers as he rode. Next time you are stuck in a public place, I highly encourage you to give this a try.

Redeeming pauses is an amazingly powerful strategy. The best part--the real cherry on top--is how unbelievably fast this strategy infuses your life with the peace of God. So get started today surrendering these moments to Him rather than fighting your own self-imposed frustrations.

## 14. Get Rest

Getting rest may seem like an odd suggestion, but fatigue is silently killing many people's prayer lives. Why?

First, fatigue robs you of focus. How can you give God your full attention when you are struggling to hold your head up? I realized the intimate relationship between fatigue and prayer a few years ago when I committed to praying an hour a day for forty days. In the beginning, I was extremely tired. My mind wandered like mad and my head bobbed as I struggled against sleep's grip.

After ten days of prayer, all of this began to change. Peace replaced restlessness and I soon started readily falling asleep in the evenings. Simultaneously, I discovered a new level of clarity and engagement in my prayer time. I am not sure if greater prayer led to greater rest or vice versa. What I did learn is that our physical well-being and our spiritual well-being are undeniably intertwined.

Second, not only will tiredness prevent you from focusing, it will lead to sin. Specifically, a weary mind will wander from God's way, fixate on impure thoughts and lead to poor decisions. How many times have you snapped and said something hurtful simply because you were dog-tired? Or, how many times have you made a decision while exhausted that you regretted.

Third, when you are fatigued you also don't have energy to serve God. Have you ever been unable to give your spouse or children attention they needed because you were exhausted? ... failed to properly prepare a Sunday school lesson because you were too drained? ...or, skipped worship to sleep in?

The bottom line is that if you truly want to give God your very best, you **MUST** rest. God commanded (not suggested) the Sabbath for a reason. You need it.

If you are currently fatigued, take steps immediately to bring your life back into balance. Here are a few suggestions to help you step back into renewed energy:

- **Have a set bedtime.** Going to sleep and rising at a set time will improve your rest.
- **Exercise.** Physical activity relieves stress, improves rest and increases energy.

- **Eat well.** Exercising proper nutrition boosts energy makes for better sleep.
- **Drink water.** Dehydration is a leading cause of fatigue. Your brain is 75% water. Fuel it.
- **Stop stimulating with caffeine and other drugs.** Stimulants stave off short-term weariness, but ultimately enable a lifestyle of ongoing fatigue.
- **Take a nap.** 20 minutes of shutting your eyes can be amazingly restorative.
- **Get outdoors.** Fresh air, sunshine and the beauty of nature are proven energizers.
- **Un-commit.** If you are overcommitted and doing too much, then quit something.
- **Declutter.** Clutter stresses, distracts and depletes you.
- **Complete unfinished tasks.** Unfinished task also stress, deplete and distract you.

## 15. Join Or Form A Prayer Group

I pray with 3 men over the phone nearly every Wednesday morning. At the time of writing this we have been meeting consistently for almost a year. Two of the men I have actually never met face to face (unless you count a google hangout) and yet they play a formative role in my life of discipleship.

### 3 REASONS YOU SHOULD PRAYER WITH A SMALL GROUP

**Wisdom:** When I share personal prayer needs, these guys almost always have some good Godly wisdom for me. Or, when they pray about my needs, the Holy Spirit seems to lead them to prayer more clearly than I have been able to.

**Support:** Perhaps, this is inherent to my statement above; nevertheless, I want to pull this out for attention. Hearing yourself prayed for is a powerful and moving experience. You feel less alone and problems seem so much smaller. You are reminded of God's faithfulness through other people's belief in the power of prayer.

**Power:** I can't quantify this, but people praying in unity has an amazing power. Agreement is a powerful thing. God's word assures us, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them" Matthew 18:20. Group pray is a powerful pathway to the presence of God.



## 5 Keys To A Great Prayer Group

**1) Let go of being self-conscious.** Many people are afraid to pray out loud. Perhaps, praying out loud feels like public speaking or maybe you are just afraid your prayers don't sound "good enough" or as good as other people's prayers.

The bottom-line is to remember that God is the audience, not the people in the group. Prayer isn't a performance, but a conversation with someone who loves you and can't wait to hear from you.

Prayers don't need to be eloquent or well articulated to be valued by God, just very honest and humble. So forget pretty prayers and just shoot for honest prayers no matter how raw the form. If you are extremely self-conscious about praying out loud, try doing it in your private pray time to help you become more comfortable with praying aloud in general.

**2) Align your silent prayers with the prayers being spoken.** Or in other words, when someone else is praying out loud, silently make what he or she is praying your prayer focus as well. Don't be lost in thinking about what you will pray next (okay, I must confess, I am really bad about this one) or be off on some unrelated prayer tangent. Seek as much unity in prayer as possible. Keep in mind that if you're thinking about praying, you're not praying.

**3) Be okay with silence.** People get uncomfortable if no one is speaking, but a big part of prayer is listening. Also, someone may also be praying about something that they aren't comfortable voicing out loud. That's okay. Let the silence be, unless you feel truly led to pray out loud. Silence can be very calming. I used to pray for 20 to 30 minutes in silence with a student group. This experience was very formative for me and brought me great peace.

**4) Make sure prayer is equal to or exceeds discussion.** Prayer groups often times become discussion groups with a little bit of prayer. This is an easy trap to fall into. If you find yourself headed down that path as a group, consider praying first and then talking or capping discussion time with a preset time limit.

**5) Observe strict confidentiality.** In general, what is prayed about in a meeting should probably stay in the meeting unless you have explicit permission to share it. Never assume, no matter how matter-of-fact a prayer request may seem, that someone wants their prayer request shared.

Similarly, exercise judgment when bringing needs to the attention of a prayer group. There is a fine line between sharing a prayer concern and just gossiping. Again asking permission may be wise. For example, if you have a best

friend having marital difficulties, even though they may desperately need prayer, they may not want those difficulties known to people in your group. Simply ask, "Would you like my prayer group to pray for you?"

Again, I can't stress how much this group of three guys I meet with means to me and how much growth praying with them has promoted in me. I feel like our time in prayer once a week has inspired and challenged me to take prayer more seriously in my daily walk. Many times God has answered my prayers, through their prayers. So again, I would urge you to find or form a small prayer group.

## **16. Visualize Prayers**

A number of years ago, I listened to a tape series about prayer by Richard Foster, author of *Celebration of Discipline*. One lesson that stood out to me and made a marked difference in my prayer life was his recommendation to visualize prayer.

### **Why Visualize?**

Presenting to God a visual image in my mind of my prayer request makes a lot of sense when I consider the fact that so often in scripture that's exactly how God spoke to people. God revealed himself and continues to do so through dreams and visions. So, if God speaks to people through images that he places in their minds, doesn't it just make sense that we might want to communicate back to God in the same way? God gave us amazing creative minds. Let us use the fullness of our minds to connect with God in prayer.

### **4 Benefits of Visualizing Prayer**

First, practice specificity. When you vividly imagine what your prayer would look like answered you tend to be far more specific in what you pray. For example, I had an extremely unruly Sunday School class of Junior High kids once (Okay, maybe more than just once). I was about to give up on this particular class when I happened to listen to the Richard Foster tape. I decided to go in early to class one Sunday and take time to pray for each child before they arrived. I walked around our table and stood behind each empty chair and prayed for the child who would be sitting in it. I visualized them engaged, helping, curious and enjoying the class. I prayed for each one of them and then for the class as a whole. I pictured how they interacted. I imagined excitement in their voices. My class was a very different class from that point forward. I can't explain how it changed things. I just know it did. At some level, it changed me and I am sure I brought a completely different spirit to the class.

Second, practice more investment in prayer. When you slow down to visualize prayer you spend more time praying. A prayer of "God please heal

Margie's broken hip" becomes several minutes of picturing Margie standing straight and tall, happy, free of pain, and delightfully mobile. I find myself more engaged and actively concerned for the person when I do this.

Third, a growing ability to focus. Between the fast pace of media, constantly interrupting cell phones, and an incessant habit of multi-tasking, many people are finding themselves having a growing difficulty focusing in prayer. If that is you, then you will very likely struggle at first with visualizing your prayers. However, with practice your ability to focus will grow. You will even see an increased focus in your prayers that are not marked by visualization.

Fourth, greater efficacy. Why? How? I don't know, but prayers that I slow down to actively visualize seem to be more obviously answered. It may be that I'm just watching with greater attention because I have a picture in my head that I am waiting to see in reality or may be it is because the intent of my prayer is so much clearer God is more responsive. I can't really explain it and you don't have to take my word for it. Try it for yourself and draw your own conclusion. So far, though greater efficacy seems to go hand-in-hand with visualizing my prayer.

## **How to Visualize**

Select something to focus on in prayer. Picture the person or situation you are praying for as it is now. Engage all of your senses and make the picture as complete and concrete as you possibly can. Next, picture the change or result that would occur if God answered your prayer. Adjust your image. Hold this new image in your mind and lift it up as your prayer to God. It is really that simple.

For example, the first church that I pastored was a small rural church with thirty-two members. We would have thirty or so people in worship each Sunday. When I prayed for growth of that little church I would vividly imagine what worship would look and feel like with forty people in our sanctuary. I would imagine the people who would be there, how old they were, what clothes they were wearing...all of the sights, sounds, textures. I would imagine how much fuller hymns could sound with those extra ten people. I imagined their smiles and warm handshakes as they greeted one another.

I will never forget looking out at the congregation on my last Sunday in the pulpit and realizing that there were exactly forty people present. God had answered my prayer quite measurably.

Obviously, you don't have to picture every prayer you pray, but if you haven't tried visualizing prayers I highly recommend trying it out for a few specific prayers.

## **17. Actively Listen**

Prayer is a two-way interaction. You must learn to listen if you want to fully experience the amazing depth of connection with God available through prayer. The thing to keep in mind is that God often answers prayer outside of your prayer time.

Once you pose a question for God or ask for guidance, take time to actively watch for God's response and take time out during your prayer time to pause and consider if God has responded. If so, how? Here are 11 ways God has spoken to others and may speak to you.

### **1. Through the Word**

I had a friend who was growing in prayer and one of the first conscious experiences he had of God speaking to him came when he had verses of Scripture 'coincidentally' come across his path in rapid succession. For example, he would pray about something and a particular verse would pop up in his life three times in the next 24 hours from totally divergent sources.

The phenomenon recurred enough that he eventually could no longer call it coincidence. You may not have a scripture come to you multiply times, but don't be surprised if you are reading the Bible and through it God suddenly brings the exact guidance, inspiration, comfort, or conviction you need.

### **2. Through people**

God will use people to speak to you. Someone will share a story or call you just when you need it the most. Again, don't be surprised if you pray for guidance and God sends you a person with the answer to your question.

### **3. Peace that passes all understanding**

When I am facing a choice I often sit in prayer with both options before me. A clear and undeniable sense of peace about one choice over another will often become obvious. You can almost physically sense this peace. For me it is much like the sensation of release you have when you struggle to remember something and then it comes. That sense of knowing is important to listening.

### **4. Through signs**

Scripture speaks many times of signs. I recall when I was considering my ministry call to Texarkana. I felt very confused. I had been through similar searches with disappointing and confusing results. I was beginning to doubt my ability to know where God was calling me.

Twenty-four hours before I went to my second interview with a particular church I went off to my sit spot in the woods to pray. I prayed for a good hour. I

knew the church wanted my wife and me to come and they were going to want answers from us soon. I finally said, "God, I need some clear undeniable sign to guide me in this. I am not certain what you want me to do. I need it before we go to that interview tomorrow."

That evening a member of the church we were serving called me. He knew nothing about my interview situation. He called to tell me that he had been on vacation and kept feeling like God wanted him to call me and tell me something. Specifically he said, "You need to leave. You will never be able to fully use your gifts here. It's time to go. I don't want you to leave, but you need to leave." That to me was a pretty undeniable sign. There was no ambiguity whatsoever.

Similarly, I had a friend who was struggling with whether or not she should return to school. She had always wanted to but placed her educational life on hold while raising her children. One morning she was praying and asked God to give her a sign whether or not she should finally pursue a college degree. When she finished praying, she turned on the radio and immediately heard the traditional graduation song, Pomp and Circumstance, playing. She had her answer.

## **5. Through dreams**

Scripture contains many examples of God speaking to people through dreams. God will warn, comfort, and instruct through dreams. I have had a couple of experiences in which God spoke rather dramatically to me through dreams. Dreams from God have an uncharacteristic clarity to them. They are so vivid that they feel more like memories than dreams.

## **6. Visions**

Visions like dreams are revelatory experiences attested to by Scripture. They are also similar to dreams in that they tend to be extremely vivid. If you have not experienced a dream or vision by God you might be prone to think of these as extremely subjective. The qualitative difference though between a revelatory experience of God and ordinary dreams or thoughts is undeniably distinct.

## **7. Circumstance**

When you pray for guidance, it is wise to pay attention to what opportunities open up and which ones close. Sometimes God leads us by opening and closing doors.

## **8. No, not now**

God doesn't seem to always respect my day timer. I recall asking God for

guidance on a retreat once about my vocation. Through a series of signs God slowly answered my prayer, but took three years to do so. Each sign was quite obviously from God, but each one only pointed me forward to the next step. All of the pieces didn't clearly make sense for three years and then the chain of response was evident.

### **9. No, not in the way you expect**

God will frequently answer prayer in ways you don't expect. Be open to that possibility. I frequently lift up to God very specific requests, but am open to any response. It's as if I am holding something out before him, but in an open hand with the expectation God will take it and do what is best.

I had a friend recently who was praying about a difficult financial situation. He prayed for help. His hope and expectation was for work opportunities. The next day his father-in-law called wanting to give he and his wife some money to help them out. His pride caused him to struggle at first with accepting it and then he realized that he graciously needed to do so because while this wasn't what he had expected it was probably a literal God send.

### **10. No**

Some Christian authors are very hesitant to say that God says 'no.' I am confident though that God knows best and at times my request is contrary to God's will and God says 'no.' That's okay. When God says 'no' or you can't see God's 'yes' that is when you must trust and lean on God the most.

### **11. A resounding undeniable 'Yes'**

I recall praying once about needing a mentor and a mentee. Within an hour my phone rang and a young man called and asked if he could come shadow me at work because he was considering going into ministry. Shortly after that I had lunch with a man who volunteered to mentor me in a massive project that I had undertaken. Neither of these people were people I sought out. They spontaneously asked to be mentored and to be my mentor.

God doesn't respond only in these ways. You can probably think of others, but hopefully by reflecting on these you will be influenced to actively look more closely for God's presence in your life.

Some people will argue that these things are very subjective. Any of them could easily just be your imagination. That is true. Even scripture which, we know to be God's word, can be misinterpreted and misapplied. Nevertheless, there is a strong biblical witness to God communicating to us in many ways. The more you study God's word and spend time in prayer, the better you will become at discerning when God is speaking and your own wishful thinking.

Is understanding God's conversation with us an exact science? No. But neither is communication in any other relationship. I misunderstand my wife at times. I don't use that as a rationalization to stop listening or believe she doesn't communicate. That said, without a doubt the more I invest in our relationship the better I become at hearing her whether it's verbal, non-verbal, blatant or subtle. The same will hold true in your relationship with God.

## 18. Be Specific

Part of clear communication and recognizing God's response is being specific in what you communicate. You can be so vague in your prayers that it is difficult to recognize when God answers them. How vague or specific are your prayers?

You will notice earlier when I was praying about my first church's attendance in worship, I had a specific number in mind, 40. I didn't just pray, "God help us grow." A bible story about Jesus comes to mind regarding specificity from Matthew 20:29-34

*"And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" And stopping, Jesus called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him."*

Answering the prayer "Have mercy on us" could have taken innumerable forms. What did the blind men really want? Obviously, they wanted their sight restored; nevertheless, Jesus sought clarification about their vague request and once he had it, he responded.

When you are being specific do heed a couple of warnings though:

- First, recognize that God is not going to favorably respond to a request that is not within God's good will.
- Second, as I mentioned earlier God may respond with "No", "No, not now" or "No, not in the way you expect." Therefore, be willing to accept God's answer.
- Third, asking God something specific as a test of who God is, is disingenuous and consequently damaging to your relationship with God.

## 19. Faithfully respond to answered prayer

So what should you do when God does answer prayer? Each answered prayer is a gift from God. I didn't realize for many years the importance of acknowledging what God did. I started to understand one day when I read the following in Romans,

*“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.” (Romans 1:21).*

This passage made me wonder how many times I had recognized God but failed to properly acknowledge Him. Since that time I have begun practicing a three-fold pattern of honoring God which includes the following:

**First, thank God.** Give credit where credit is due and thank God for what God does.

**Second, honor God with obedience.** Often times within an answered prayer you will be called to action. Obey. For example, if God places someone in your life that you need, build the relationship. If God calls you to a task, do it with all of your heart, strength, soul and mind.

**Third, honor God by sharing with others what God has done.** Multiple passages affirm the importance of extolling God's wondrous deeds. For example,

- “Remember to extoll His work, of which men have sung.” Job 36:24
- “I will thank you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise you.” Psalm 35:18
- “With the mighty deeds of the Lord God I will come; I will remind them of your righteousness, yours alone. Psalm 71:16.

As you honor God's gifts, God will entrust you with more.

## 20. Persist

God answers some prayers in a moment, some in a lifetime, but do not lose heart. Paul directed the Thessalonians to, “Pray without ceasing.” First Thessalonians 5:17. For years I interpreted this to mean that we are to pray in some way every moment. I still believe this is true, in as much as we are able perform all our actions as grateful response. In so doing, our actual lives become prayer.

However, recently, I heard a pastor interpret Paul's words to mean that we should not give up on praying for a situation. That when we commit to pray we



need to persist in praying. Jesus himself taught that we are not to lose heart in praying. He did so using a parable. The Gospel of Luke records it as follows:

*And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Luke 18:1-7*

So do not grow weary in your prayers, but persist. I know that is easier said than done. I had a member of my family who struggled with alcoholism for years. Day after day I prayed for him. I almost didn't know what more to say. An older woman in my first congregation had been through a similar experience. A pastor she had years before told her that each time she thought of her family member simply say to God, "God please remember Tony." And that was it.

I followed her example. Some times I was drawn to prayer more, but quite often I just asked God to remember my family member and I called him by name. That prayer wasn't answered for nearly a decade, but eventually it was.

If you are beginning to grow weary of praying, you may simply need to simplify or change how you are praying. Be honest with God about your weariness. Then ask the Spirit to guide you and to give you a steadfast spirit.

Using a prayer trigger may also be helpful. The pastor who counseled the woman in my church gave her a trigger whether he intended to do so or not. Did you catch what was the trigger? Every time she thought of the person she was to offer a short prayer. Your trigger could be something else, but choose one to cue you to pray.

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This concludes our best practices. I could add much more, but as I said in the beginning, "Nothing will teach you more about prayer than praying."

So let's switch gears and figure out how you can strategically select the best practices that will most benefit your prayer life right now.

## Implementing What You Have Learned

Before you even begin to implement anything you have learned in this book you need to absolutely zero in on EXACTLY what the end result is you desire? Specifically, I would recommend selecting one or two of the five pillars of life-changing prayer that you would like to strengthen. For review, here they are again along with some questions to help you decide which one you should work on:

**Consistency**--How often are you praying? Do you regularly connect with God or are you only giving God your spare time? Are you only going to God in prayer when you need something?

**Breadth**--How diverse is your conversation with God? When praying do you some times feel as if you are in a conversation where you don't really quite know what to say? Do you ever feel as if you are just praying the same old things over and over again?

**Depth**--Is your understanding of God growing? Do you have an ever deepening sense of relationship with God? Do you frequently recognize God at work? Do you spend more and more time honoring God and listening to God?

**Focus**--Does your mind wander all over the place like a bird without a perch to land on? Do you fall asleep or feel bored while praying? Can you only pray for a few minutes at a time?

**Integration**--Does prayer shape what goes on your to-do list each day? Do you pray throughout the day? Do you reflect on what's going on in your life and thank or praise God for blessings that you see each day?

When you get clear on which pillars you want to work on, use the best practice lists in the next section to select some activities that would help you strategically target your efforts. Limit yourself to working only one or two practices at a time and then stack up your successes. Consistency is the key to transformative growth.

Once you have done that WRITE out an action plan. Having a written action plan will dramatically improve your odds for success. I have included three sample action plans immediately following the best practice lists. Hopefully, these will help you create your own action plan.

## Best Practice Lists

Select one or two pillars that you would like to strength. Below are lists of the best practice to most strengthen the pillars they are listed under. You will notice that many best practices will strengthen you in more than one pillar. Select just a few to work on at any given time. This list is also available in a more convenient chart form at <http://tipsonprayer.com/bestpracticechart.pdf> .

### Consistency

- Designate a time and place
- Develop a devotional time routine
- Use an opening action
- Keep a prayer list or catch
- Use triggers or a prayer alarm
- Redeem unexpected pauses
- Get rest
- Create “Prayer Points” by linking prayer to common tasks
- Join or form a prayer group
- Persist

### Breadth

- Pray for understanding
- Include scripture
- Use a prayer model: Acts Prayer, Five Finger Prayer or The Examen
- Scripture Journaling
- Use a devotional guide
- Imitate great prayers
- Create “prayer points” by linking prayer to common tasks
- Join or form a prayer group

### Depth

- Pray for understanding
- Include scripture
- Meditate and listen
- Use a prayer model: Acts Prayer, Five Finger Prayer or The Examen
- Scripture Journaling
- Keep a prayer diary
- Use a devotional guide
- Imitate great prayers
- Link prayer to common tasks
- Redeem unexpected pauses

- Respond to answered prayer
- Faithfully respond to answered prayer
- Visualize prayers
- Actively listen
- Persist

## **Focus**

- Develop a devotional time routine
- Use an opening act
- Include scripture
- Meditate and listen
- Use a prayer model: Acts Prayer, Five Finger Prayer or The Examen
- Scripture Journaling
- Keep a prayer list or catch
- Keep a prayer diary
- Pray aloud/sing
- Use a devotional guide
- Imitate great prayers
- Prayer posture
- Get rest
- Join or form a prayer group
- Create “prayer points” by linking prayer to common tasks
- Visualize prayers
- Actively listen
- Persist

## **Integration**

- Designate a time and place
- Include scripture
- The Examen
- Use a devotional guide
- Identify a G.I.F.T.
- Use triggers or a prayer alarm
- Link prayer to common tasks
- Redeem unexpected pauses
- Respond to answered prayer

## Sample Written Action Plans

When creating an action plan write down a clear goal and the action steps you will take to move toward it. Also, decide on a fixed length of time you will commit to before reevaluating.

### **Sample Action Plan #1--Working on consistency and focus for a beginner.**

*GOAL: My goals are to establish a daily prayer time and maintain it for the next 30 days and to work on staying more focused during my prayers.*

*ACTION STEPS: I will pray every morning just after breakfast in our den. The best practices I will be using are: the Acts prayer and keeping a prayer diary. Specifically, I want to record how I see God at work in my life and the lives of other people.*

### **Sample Action Plan #2--Working on integration.**

*GOAL: My goal is to become more aware of God throughout the day. I feel like I don't really acknowledge God until the day is over when I pray at night before I go to sleep. Even then I often fall asleep while praying and don't even really remember praying much.*

*ACTION STEPS: I am going to use the Examen prayer method at night because it will help me start thinking spiritually about my day. During that prayer time I am going to identify a G.I.F.T. for the next day. I will write my G.I.F.T. down and include in my Examen the next day a reflection on how well I did at accomplishing it.*

### **Sample Action Plan #3--Working on Focus and Breadth**

*GOAL: My goal is to be less scattered in my thoughts while praying and I would like to expand what I pray about. I feel like my prayers are really limited. I want to pray less about myself and more about other people and concerns.*

*ACTION STEPS: I am going to use John Baillie's Diary of Private Prayer for one month. I will read his morning prayer to start the day and try to write in my own words a similar prayer. I will do the same in the evening with his evening prayer.*

As you can readily see, these action plans are not grand, exalted, or complex plans. Keep your goals simple, measurable and achievable. Just be sure and act on them consistently until they become a natural part of your prayer life. That's when they become life-changing.

## Important Final Words

If you are ready for change, PLEASE do the work. I can give you tools, motivation, examples, and all the lessons I learned the hard way, but only you can do the work.

I had a friend whose doctor advised her that she needed to lose weight. She promptly went out and bought a treadmill. Several months later she went back to her doctor for a physical. She hadn't lost a pound. He again asserted that she had to lose weight. She retorted, "Well I bought a treadmill!" He replied, "You can't just buy the treadmill, you have to get on it."

There is an epidemic number of Christian believers who are essentially buying exercise equipment for the soul and never getting on it. How do I know this? Because I have been that guy and I see it in ministry all of the time. Don't hop from one book or class to the next without doggedly applying what you learn.

I want to remind you that nothing will teach you more about prayer than praying. Nor will any book transform you more than interacting directly with God. So, pick one of the Five Pillars of Life-Changing Prayer to work on. Select one or two best practices or advanced tips and then work those tools--work them, work them, work them.

Lastly, I want to give you a word of warning. Prayer will change you and change isn't all fun and games, even when it is a change for the better. The more you draw near to God's holiness, the more painfully aware you will become of anything in your life that is incongruent with the Holy Spirit. This is a good thing, but often times difficult.

St. John of the Cross described this phase of spiritual growth as the "dark night of the soul." Just know that dark nights of the soul are a normative and unavoidable part of the path of discipleship. Stay on the path and you will find light soon enough. One beautiful aspect of this dissent of the soul is that the more you come to grasp how unholy you are, the more you will be able to grasp God's goodness and grace.

So, persevere. Stay the course. Run the race and fight the good fight. Blessings to you as you apply these best practices of life-changing prayer and may the Holy Spirit profoundly impact your life through them. My prayer is that from these practices you will not just learn how to pray, but in practicing them, may you come to know what it means to live a prayerful life.

**Please be kind and review...**

If you have received even on blessing by reading this book please be kind and review it on Amazon.com. I need your feedback to improve the next edition.

### **Speaking of future additions...**

I have several other books in the works and periodically I offer live online training. If you would like to take advantage of these upcoming learning opportunities, get on my advanced notification list by going to the following link:

<http://tipsonprayer.com/notification-request>

In Jesus Christ's Joy and Service,

Rev. John Arnold, The Practical Disciple

# Recommended Resources and Links

## Miscellaneous Resources

- Your 4 Bonus Audios, <http://tipsonprayer.com/bonus-access>
- The Practical Disciple Resource Page, <http://thepracticaldisciple.com/resources>.
- Video Presentation on My Personal Devotional Practices, <http://tipsonprayer.com/prayer-instruction-daily-devotional-time/>
- Eradicating Spiritual Virus <http://thepracticaldisciple.com/2008/08/eradicating-spiritual-virus.html>.
- Tips On Prayer Chart of Best Practices <http://tipsonprayer.com/bestpracticechart.pdf>

## Devotional Guides

- These Days, <http://www.ppcbooks.com/thesedays.asp>)
- Upper Room Daily Devotional Guide, <http://devotional.upperroom.org/>)
- Our Daily Bread Devotional Guide, <http://odb.org/>
- My Utmost for His Highest, <http://astore.amazon.com/thepracticaldisciple-20>
- Streams in the Desert , <http://astore.amazon.com/thepracticaldisciple-20>
- Diary of Private Prayer, <http://astore.amazon.com/thepracticaldisciple-20>

## Websites

- The Practical Disciple, <http://thepracticaldisciple.com>
- Tips On Prayer, <http://tipsonprayer.com>
- Pray Fit, <http://prayfit.com>



## About the Author



Well, if you haven't figure it out by now, I am passionately devoted to making growth in the Christian faith as practical as I possibly can make it. That's been the driving force behind my ministry over the past 20 years of pastoring various churches. As well as, the passion that drove me to create the blog, <http://ThePracticalDisciple.com>.

When I am not dreaming or writing about how to help people live life better you will most likely catch me spending time with my wife and co-pastor, Rev. Dr. Susan Arnold and/or my two awesomely funny and talented children Matthew and Ruth. (You guys rock—Woot! Woot! for team Arnold.) We love performing in local theater together, hiking around outdoors, roller-skating, skeet shooting and whatever mess of fun we can dream up. That...and we laugh a lot, a whole lot.

I am also the Chief Inspiration Officer (Isn't that the coolest title ever?) of The 7 Minute Life, Inc. Which is just another excuse for me to dream and write about helping people live better lives. We're working hard to knock down some really faulty thinking people have about time management and replace it with honest to goodness tools that help you Do Less and Be More at work and home. You should check us out if you're tired of feeling busy all the time ready to love your life. <http://The7MinuteLife.com>.

Well, that's a really nutshell version of me. Connect with me online at:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/thepracticaldisciple>

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/ThePracticalDisciple>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/disciplehelper>

Blessings,  
Rev. John Arnold  
The Practical Disciple