

# Spiritual Awakening at Arizona State University



About five years ago, the Sentinel Group, directed by George Otis, Jr., began working with a small ministry in Tempe, AZ, called LoveASU. Comprised of intercessors, ministry workers, and students, the group had been inspired by Transformations videos to pray for spiritual awakening on the campus of Arizona State University (ASU).

In recent months, this university has been in the grip of a spiritual awakening. United prayer is a major factor behind these developments. After several tough years, during which campus ministries tended to go their own way, things changed in the fall of 2017. Instead of the usual two to three ministries coming together before God, prayer events at the local Campus Christian Center experienced a three-fold increase in intercessory participants.

Last year, a dozen ministries united behind a 40-day prayer focus, during which petitions were lifted day and night from within a tent erected near the main campus square. The initiative was so fruitful, the ministries decided to continue the effort over the balance of the academic semester. In fall 2018, the tally of participating ministries and campus churches reached 17. A fresh 56-day campaign drew prodigals, atheists, Muslims, New Agers, and students suffering from depression. In addition to witnessing numerous conversions, healings, and deliverances, the intercessors also watched God begin to move among the university faculty and administration.

One of the more significant breakthroughs involved the school's Interfaith Council of Religious Advisors. For years,

the woman directing the council was motivated to establish ASU as a model of the global interfaith movement. As time went by, her attitude toward Christians hardened, and ministries found their access to campus facilities severely limited.

Faced with this opposition, students and ministry leaders began to pray that God would either change this woman's heart or install someone more sympathetic.

Within a period of weeks, this woman disappeared from the Interfaith Council. Today, the council is headed by the son of a Baptist minister. Even more dramatic has been the departure from the university of an atheist professor who routinely packed out an auditorium on campus by bringing in atheist luminaries such as Richard Dawkins and the late Stephen Hawking.[sentinelgroup.org](http://sentinelgroup.org)

Transforming winds have also been coursing through the university's athletic department. In late 2018, more than 100 Christian student athletes attended an all-sport gathering in the men's football facility, worshiping, praying, and listening to inspirational messages. An estimated 20–30 football players have turned their lives over to Jesus in recent months. As one student athlete told Otis, "The identity of ASU is being flipped."

—GEORGE OTIS, The Sentinel Group, adapted from a Nov. 15, 2018, email.

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## Faith on Trial

# Strength under Tension

By Dana Olson



Bummer. After all, it was the Fourth of July—and instead of sitting at a picnic table eating a burger, I was sitting on an exam table in the heart hospital's ER, waiting.

For weeks I had noticed odd symptoms. Previous tests had shown nothing (or so I thought). But now, after my heartbeat went from “marching band snare drum” to “funky jazz drum solo,” I landed on this bench, awaiting results from high-tech picture-taking. The young ER doctor looked perplexed as he entered. “Tell me about this mass on your spleen.”

“I don’t know anything about my spleen,” I replied, stunned. Apparently previous testing had shown an obvious abnormality, but I had not been notified due to office error.

Uncertainty followed. My “busy pastor” schedule was cleared, more tests conducted, consultations held. Multiple diagnoses were considered as I alternated between my own bed at home and a woefully inadequate hospital bed. Finally, a fuzzy picture became clear: non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma cancer and an extensive blood clot. My life changed dramatically.

## Prayer Lessons

In the three years since, many have asked what I learned from

hearing the C word, going through surgery, and experiencing rapid hair loss. It's taken a while to figure that out.

I preached two out of every three Sundays during chemo. My hair loss presented no great challenge. I spent lots of time in a big chair and special bed—both purchased by caring friends. Mostly, I tried to keep going, day by day, but with extra rest. I took my meds—and still do.

One hymn I'd sung from my youth meant the world to me. I sang it to myself again and again:

Jesus, I am resting, resting In the joy of what Thou art; I am finding out the greatness Of Thy loving heart.<sup>1</sup>

The time to build up your “faith bank account” is today. Don't wait until trials come. While facing a threatening diagnosis, relational breakdown, profound disappointment, disillusioning failure, or devastating loss, the withdrawals come fast and furious. You will need to have banked faith to draw upon.

Here are truths to help you prepare:

**1. God is in control.** You can trust Him. That doesn't mean circumstances always turn out well. Life isn't like the smiling, late-night TV preacher who offers health and wealth. Cancer can kill. Life presents an extensive variety of hurts and heartaches. To deny that is to deny sin's profound impact on humanity. Jesus says, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Our God is Lord of heaven and earth. He holds the future. He makes all grace abound to you, whatever the circumstance—in life and death, in joy and sorrow, in pain and pleasure.

**2. God sees.** In Genesis 22, the gospel comes alive on a mountain at Moriah. Abraham obeys the Lord and takes his beloved son Isaac and prepares to offer him to the Lord. But the Lord intervenes. God provides a ram as a substitute for

Isaac, and Abraham names that place “The Lord will provide” (v. 14)—in Hebrew, Jehovah Jireh, which means, literally, “God sees.” The passage is a neon sign pointing ahead to Jesus, the divine Substitute who died on the cross in our place. God sees you in your heartache. He sees your suffering. And when God sees, He provides.

His provision comes in expected and unexpected ways. The God who sees you in your distress might send a wave of Holy Spirit comfort, or an old friend to sit with you, or a passage of Scripture to point you to hope, or someone from your church who shows up with your favorite meal. He might send a job offer, a check from an old friend, or a bag of groceries. God might send a counselor, a favorite uncle, a neighbor, or a stranger. Watch how He faithfully provides.

**3. God cares.** I’m no fisherman, but I know that effectiveness requires learning to cast the line into the water. Similarly, in our suffering, God tells us, “Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). This marvelous verse’s context reminds us that such humbling of ourselves (v. 6) requires vigilant watchfulness (v. 8). We dare not give in to the devil’s scheme, tempting us to despair and turn our backs on our heavenly Father. Instead, we press in to Him. We call upon Him. We pray earnestly. We cast and keep casting!

Why? Because God cares. He showed His merciful care for us by sending His Son to be our Savior, Redeemer, and Friend. He continues showing believers that loving care every day, for His Spirit dwells in us and is our Comforter. The cynic says, “God doesn’t care about you.” The cross screams otherwise.

**4. God prepares.** Suffering is a kind of preparatory school. God is preparing us for Himself. And He is preparing a place for us to spend eternity with Him. This is our hope in suffering: “If I go [and He has gone] and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:3, brackets added).

For us to be with God requires holiness. Our holiness requires the divine washing by Christ's precious blood, followed by the divine surgery transforming us from the inside out to be God's holy people. The whole process is the great grace-work of justification (in a moment) and sanctification (over a lifetime). Suffering is part of God's sculpting work in our sanctification. But the destination—the very presence of God Himself—is worth every bit of the suffering.

## **Prayer Strategy**

So why and how can we pray with confidence in the midst of painful suffering

- Because God is in control, let your prayer be filled with praise and adoration to the One who alone is God: "Hallowed be your name." Let your prayer reflect your sweet submission to your Father in heaven. "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (see Matt. 6:9–13)
- Because God sees, and when He sees He provides, ask God for the daily bread of His sustaining grace, whatever that might be. Jesus asked Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" (see Mark 10:46–52). We have a wonderful privilege to answer Jesus' question, praying, "Father, here's what I long for You to do for me." Keep in mind, the answer will not always come quickly. Often God wants to work in us through the waiting! But if we trust Him for His timing—and if we stay patient—we will see His hand and His heart in due time.
- Because God cares, keep casting! From the midst of pain, don't be afraid to honestly tell the Lord what is on your heart. Any burden can be transferred from our broken hearts to His broad, strong shoulders. As you cast your cares upon Him, remember that the committed believer's greatest desire is always this: that Jesus Christ be magnified. Paul reminds us, "Do it all for the

glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). What seems like silence to us may in fact be God's strategic timing, using our suffering for His glory in some remarkable way we don't see now. In my case, I believe my cancer and complications were tools in God's hand, working powerfully in me and in our church. We are taking steps of faith today that I believe are answers to heart cries during my illness. We too easily focus only on ourselves. God's agenda is far larger and more complex. Nevertheless, from your suffering, don't stop casting! One more cast may yield the big fish of God's awesome answer to your prayer.

- Because God is preparing you and preparing a place for you, pray with hope. Hope is faith applied to the future. When you trust God today to do mighty things that will last forever, that is hope! When you pray big, expansive prayers that will be finally answered in the new heavens and new earth, that is hope-filled praying. When you pray, knowing that the final outcome will arrive with the return of Christ, that is hope on its knees.

Our cry for God to make us whole inherently applies to our holiness.

## **Prayer Strength**

Engineers work with the concept of tensile strength: the maximum stress that can be applied to an object under tension before it breaks. Cancer is only one of many possible tension producers in life. You can fill in the blanks for yourself. What has brought significant tension to your life? What has threatened to break you, in the past or present? What fiery darts have come your direction from the world, the flesh, or the devil? Whatever is putting stress on you, keep on praying.

Your prayer life can greatly strengthen your spiritual tensile strength. Trials will test you—and they are inevitable. But by prayer you can be prepared, can pray through, and pray beyond the trial. Build up your tensile strength now. Prepare yourself to pray through the difficulty. Here are practical ways to endure the tension of suffering:

**1. Keep on praying.** Don't stop. When you can't even put your prayers into words, sigh. Groan. The Holy Spirit Himself will intercede for you. Take Romans 8:26 to heart. Rest in the presence of God and in the joy of Jesus, your Savior and Friend.

**2. Stay in the Word of God.** Make the Bible your companion in suffering. Let the Psalms give expression to your own journey through pain, and God will meet you there. Both the psalms of lament and the psalms of adoration and praise can build your tensile strength. Where to start? Try Psalm 42:5:

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

**3. Ask others to pray for you!** Yes, the Spirit of God will intercede for you, but so will brothers and sisters in Christ. Don't be shy. Ask for their intercession. Phone, email, or text: "I really need you to pray for me right now. It's hard." Let the body of Christ lift you up in your pain to the Father's throne of grace.

**4. Sing!** If you can't sing, hum. So many Christian songs are prayers that can express our heart's yearnings during suffering. I recommend my favorite, "Jesus, I am Resting, Resting," but you undoubtedly have other songs, hymns, and spiritual songs that lift your heart and mind up to God. If you can't sing or hum, listen to the music of fellow believers who for centuries have made music out of their own journey with pain, songs such as "Day by Day":



Help me then in every tribulation  
So to trust Thy promises, O  
Lord, That I lose not faith's sweet consolation  
Offered me within Thy holy word.  
Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble  
meeting; E'er to take, as from a father's hand,  
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting,  
Till I reach the promised land.<sup>2</sup>

How is your spiritual tensile strength? What is the maximum you can endure by faith? Are you ready for life's next great trial? Holy-spirit enabled prayer, aligned with the promises of God's Word, can prepare you for whatever the Father allows to come your way—from daily stresses to the ER on the 4th of July.

<sup>1</sup> Jean S. Pigott, "Jesus, I Am Resting, Resting," 1876, public domain.  
<sup>2</sup> Karolina Sandell Berg, tr. A.L. Skoog, "Day by Day," 1865, public domain.

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Taken from *Prayer Connect* magazine. To subscribe so you can have access to all back issues of *Prayer Connect*, plus 4 new ones, go to <https://prayerleader.com/membership>

## **Surviving Isolation**

**By Jackie Harmon**

Eight years ago, I traveled to Ethiopia to meet the little boy God called our family to adopt. I received Miles with open arms. Three years later, those arms were covered in scars, scratches, and bite marks. Every interaction with this child,

who has the challenge of autism, was physically painful. And I landed in the darkest place my heart and mind had ever been.

I spent a lot of time at home with Miles, isolated from people. God used my isolation as an invitation to stand in the gap, praying for my husband, my pastor, and my friends in ministry. God sealed on my heart the words, Not on my watch. I made it my mission to pray for hundreds of marriages, families, and ministries every month. God used that time to fill my heart with love for “my people,” so I felt connected to their lives and ministries—even though I was still isolated.

Besides calling me to pray for marriages and ministries, God also invited me to change the way I was praying for Miles. In Matthew 11, Jesus sends word to John the Baptist, saying, “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me” (v. 6, NIV 1984).

When I first read those words, it was like Jesus was saying, “Jackie, I know what adding Miles to your family has done. I know that caring for him is hard. But I’m not coming for you. I’m not rescuing you. Do not lose faith because of Me.”

I no longer pray that Miles progresses emotionally out of the terrible twos or that he will one day be potty-trained. My prayer is that, no matter what, I will not lose faith because of Jesus.

Nothing has challenged me to keep my eyes and heart fixed on Jesus more than the gift of Miles, who has the gift of autism. Caring for Miles is the hardest thing I’ve ever done—and it is the greatest privilege of my life!

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# When Words Seem to Fail

## How to Pray for and Encourage Those Who Suffer

By Bishop Harry Jackson



We don't like to talk about suffering. And since we don't fully understand God's purposes in it, we don't know how to act in crises.

At the writing of this article, I am only 50 days past the unexpected death of my wife of 41 years and three months. Dr. Vivian Michele Jackson was a survivor of sexual abuse at age seven, domestic violence in her teenage years, a life-threatening blood disease before she entered college, sexual harassment in her college days, persecution for her stand for Christ as adult, and a ten-year struggle with blood cancer. She was an overcomer—and my covenant partner.

When she passed away, I learned firsthand what a struggle it is for Christians to know how to respond to those who are suffering. In honor of my late wife, and based on what the Lord has taught me through Vivian's life and death, let me share some ways to pray for those going through suffering.

Most Christians have three key questions related to suffering. The following biblical insights and sample prayers can frame our responses as we engage with those who need our encouragement.

## **Question 1: What Is the Purpose of Christian Suffering?**

Our God is not the author of all the suffering and loss in our world. The enemy of our souls is very real. Jesus told us that the thief (Satan) comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10–12). Satan's active, evil influence exists in each of our lives, but God will use these personal battles (the loss and pressures of life) to help us grow.

Pushing back, in a manner consistent with the Word of God, develops our emotional and spiritual lives. The Bible explains this phenomenon in Romans 5:3–5: "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

Our prayer can be something like this:

Lord, help my friend accept the pain and the process of grieving while choosing to recognize the Lord's opportunity for growth in his or her struggles (James 1:2). Please infuse my friend with the comfort of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:4).

## **Question 2: How Are Christians Supposed to Act When They Suffer?**

The answer to this question is simple. We need to keep living, loving, and dreaming. Our well-being depends on how quickly we transition to a godly perspective. Let me explain.

In the Book of Job we find that Satan's goal was to bring a

wedge between Job and God. Tools in our enemy's arsenal included sickness, domestic difficulties, loss of possessions, and the tragic death of loved ones. Satan designed these experiences to overwhelm the heart and mind of this faithful family man and motivate Job to rebel against the person and character of God.

These events were so dramatic that some people who read Job 1 take on a "second-hand offense." Assuming God is making a bet with Satan about Job's faithfulness—these people accuse our Lord of being insensitive and arbitrary. But that spiritually and emotionally cluttered perspective creates traps related to suffering. God calls us, like Job, to trust His protective care. In seasons of loss and suffering, there are real manifestations of grief and unique grieving processes we must endure.

Let's go a little deeper. The following is a definition of grief and some accompanying manifestations (from [medicinenet.com](http://medicinenet.com)):

The normal process of reacting to a loss. The loss may be physical (such as a death), social (such as divorce), or occupational (such as a job). Emotional reactions of grief can include anger, guilt, anxiety, sadness, and despair. Physical reactions of grief can include sleeping problems, changes in appetite, physical problems, or illness.

In the months since my wife's death, I have experienced an emotional roller coaster, accompanied by many of the grief symptoms listed in this definition. Christians, however, have the Holy Spirit's power to navigate the waters of adversity.

So how are we to handle our tribulations?

- By carrying out our daily duties and responsibilities, looking to the Lord.
- By forgiving persons who have offended us.
- By not blaming God for "treating us unfairly."

Our prayer for those going through seasons of suffering can follow this general approach:

Heavenly Father, I thank You for my friend(s) and their calling in Christ! May they receive the comfort and encouragement of the Spirit of God. Remind them that the comfort they receive from You is also preparing them to help others. Despite the depth of pain, assure them that resurrection-life anointing and grace will pour out of them to others with similar afflictions in the days ahead. Father, remind them that there is Kingdom value in what they are going through. May they also remember that they “are more than conquerors” (Rom. 8:37) and that they will get through this.

### **Question 3: How Do I Minister to My Grieving Friend?**

After more than 40 years in ministry, I have learned that a person’s presence is the most needed ministry in times of grief. Even though I have spent most of my adult life as a wordsmith and orator, just being present with family and friends in their loss can be more precious and powerful than an amazing sermon. I too have experienced this ministry of presence.

I kissed my wife Vivian goodbye on Easter Sunday afternoon. I jumped into a limo with my friend and associate pastor David Parlette and headed to the airport and ultimately Johannesburg, South Africa. By the time I reached my hotel room, my eldest daughter informed me of my wife’s sudden passing.

The presence of Pastor Dave was amazingly supportive during the more than 36 hours it took us to get back home. We prayed together and ate a few meals together, but most importantly I felt comfortable enough with him to sit in silence—in a state of shock mixed with thankfulness and horror.

Our prayer for friends going through suffering might include

this kind of focus:

Lord help me practice the ministry of presence for my friend. Let me understand and perceive that person's love language. I want to be an answer to his or her needs, not a self-absorbed intruder. As I attend to the things You assign me that will help my friend in practical ways, please send other servants motivated by love to express and minister Your comfort. Let the body of Christ be my friend's "bridge over troubled water" and a conduit for the love of God.

When we gain insight into God's perspective on suffering, we can practice the presence of encouragement—with or without words! And our prayers will bring God's peace and comfort to friends in need.

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Taken from *Prayer Connect* magazine. To subscribe go to <https://prayerleader.com/membership>.

## **Prayer Guide for Those Who are Suffering**

**By Sandra Higley and Danielle Schofield**

Suffering comes in all shapes and sizes: chronic illness, persecution, relational heartaches, loss of a loved one, senseless tragedy, stresses of many kinds. We all face suffering at one time or another. In addition to praying for specifics centered on individual circumstances, here are a few

ways to pray, based on what Scripture says about suffering.

### **Kingdom Warfare**

Father, this child of Yours has gone through unspeakable distress. Help those who are suffering to worship You in the midst of circumstances they don't understand. Lift them out of the hurtful details of what is happening so they get the bigger picture of its Kingdom impact. Help them trust You and hold on to the end, knowing You have a plan in mind for them. May they know You in a deeper, more meaningful way as a result of this circumstance (Job 1-2; 42:1-6, 10-16; Ps. 71:20).

### **God's Glory**

Father, if this suffering is intended to bring You glory, let it be so! Give Your suffering children the strength and joy to honor You during this difficult time. Deepen their understanding of the inheritance issues at stake when they share in Christ's sufferings. Help them to recognize that what they are going through is no comparison to the glory that will be revealed in them; help them wait for it with eager expectation. As they run the race through this trial, help them resist confusion and instead manifest the fruit of the Spirit (John 11:4; Rom. 8:17-19; Gal. 5:7-8, 22-23).

### **God's Grace**

Lord God, help Your servants embrace Your no as well as Your yes. Assure them that You see and hear them. Enable them to see Your power at work through these difficult circumstances. Show Yourself strong through their fragile state. Thank You that in spite of everything they are not crushed, driven to despair, or abandoned by You. Help them get up when circumstances knock them down so that Jesus' life shines through them (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

### **Identification with Christ**



Jesus, help Your beloved to see that this hatred they are experiencing is visible proof they belong to You and not the world. Encourage them to take a humble view of this identity as they continue to obey Your teaching and walk in love. Help them to fully know You and the power of Your resurrection, even as this situation causes them to become more and more like You. Let every act of unjust suffering commend them to God (Isa. 43:1; John 15:18–21; Phil. 3:10; 1 Peter 2:18–20).

### **Faithful Friends**

Heavenly Father, give Your suffering children true friends who seek to lighten their load rather than cause additional heartache. Give friends and family empathy for what the sufferers are going through; help them resist the urge to judge or assume they would handle things differently if put in the same situation. Help friends and loved ones to look for ways to encourage rather than chastising, condemning, or minimizing these overwhelming situations. Hold accountable those who profess to speak for You. Help sufferers to forgive and pray for any who allow the enemy to use them as unjust accusers. Help those afflicted to bless and not curse (Job 42:7–10; Luke 6:28).

### **Proper Discernment**

Father, give these dear ones a proper understanding of what is going on through this trial. Give them wisdom and courage to ask the right questions about fears, concerns, and needs. While it is commendable to suffer without cause, show Your children if there are other reasons this suffering has come to them. Without guilt or condemnation, help them to recognize any sin in their lives that needs to be dealt with according to Your Word. Help them to find a trustworthy person to come alongside them in prayer and confession if needed—someone in right relationship with You (Rom. 8:1; James 5:13–16; 1 Peter 2:18–20).

## Forbearance to Wait on the Lord

Father God, give Your hurting child the forbearance to wait on You, knowing we go through various seasons and each one has its purpose. Thank You that while weeping lasts for a night, You bring joy when the night is past. Turn their mourning to dancing! (Ps. 30:5, 11; Eccl. 3:1–3).

—SANDRA HIGLEY is an author and the editor of Real Life Downloaded (Youth Edition), an online Sunday school curriculum supplement that is free of charge. Download the free Real Life Downloaded app. She co-authored this article with her daughter, who has a debilitating (sometimes fatal) disease with no known cure. Note: Danielle went to be with Jesus in the summer of 2020.

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# 4 Creative Ways to Pray

## How to Take Your Praying Beyond the Norm

By Paul Covert



Many believers struggle with prayer—often because they lack variety. They remind me of a

friend who went shopping and bought ten pairs of black cotton cargo pants and 15 blue T-shirts. He wears the same thing every day. There's no variety. His morning routine never changes.

Some Christians use the same method of prayer they were taught decades earlier—even if it does not fit their personality or interests. So their prayer lives feel routine or even foreign to the way they are wired.

Over the last decade, in an effort to bring new life to the prayers of Christ followers, I have collected many creative ways to pray. Here are a few you might try privately—or with friends in your small group.

## **1. Praying the Pictures of the Scripture**

I enjoy praying word pictures of Jesus from the Bible. The vivid pictures of Jesus throughout the Gospels can stimulate prayer. I am not talking about the illustrations in the back of a Bible but rather the glimpses of Jesus' life so real they create pictures in our minds.

For example, in Luke 9:37–43 Jesus comes down from the Mountain of Transfiguration and a great crowd gathers. A man whose only son is harassed by a demon cries out to Jesus, “Look at my son, for he is my only child.” The man explains his desperation: “I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not.”

Jesus calls for the boy to be brought to Him. Even before the child reaches Jesus, the unclean spirit throws the boy to the ground. Jesus rebukes the demon and gives the child back to his father.

I love to “pray this picture” by personalizing it for Annie and me with our own three sons. “Lord, will You look upon our sons and heal them in their struggles?” The image of Jesus giving the son back to his father is fabulous. Some people

have a child who is ill or estranged from them, and the picture of Jesus giving their child back, completely healed and whole, takes my breath away.

**Practice it:** There are hundreds of word pictures in Scripture and many ways to pray each one in fresh ways. Here are a few to get started:

- Peter walking on the water (Matt. 14:22–33)
- God informing Moses that His name is I am (Ex. 3:14)
- Jesus with the little children on His lap (Mark 10:13–16).

**You'll know you have it when . . .** your mind starts to see pictures of Jesus and God all through the Scriptures and you can pray them freely. This will open a new realm of prayer for you.

## **2. Blessing Others**

Blessing is the act of communicating approval or encouragement to others we care about. It is a powerful concept in the Scriptures.

- God blessed Adam and Eve when He created them and placed them in the garden (Gen. 1:27–28).
- Before Jacob died, he gave a blessing to each of his 12 sons (Gen. 49).
- • In Genesis 27:26–29, Isaac blessed his son Jacob: “Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s richness—an abundance of grain and new wine.”

One of the joys of my life is gathering my grandchildren on my lap and praying a prayer of blessing over each one. I pray for such things as their safety, their walk with God, their future spouses, strong health, sensitivity to the Spirit of God, love for their siblings, and favor with God and man. Then I give them each a kiss and a huge hug and send them home with their

parents. This family tradition has become a happy time for all of us.

The concept is transferable. You can pray a blessing over your husband or wife before he or she leaves for work in the morning. You can pray a blessing over your children at night before bed.

Praying a blessing over your neighbors—or even your enemies—is a healthy and spiritually mature thing to do.

**Practice it:** This week look for someone you can bless. It may be a family member or friend, but select a different one each day. Place a hand on him or her (if that is appropriate) and pray a blessing over that person. Choose a place where he or she will not be embarrassed, and pray over such aspects as health, future, relationships, and walk with God.

**You'll know you have it when . . .** blessing others is part of your daily routine. Imagine how many people can be refreshed and strengthened by such prayers.

### **3. Kingdom Praying**

We all pray many kinds of prayers, including casual prayers like, “God, I am late for the doctor’s appointment. Please turn all the lights between here and there green.” Or sometimes we pray crisis prayers that have a different kind of urgency: “Oh, no, I have cancer. Please heal me, Lord!”

There is nothing wrong with either kind of prayer, but don’t forget to add Kingdom prayers to this mix. Kingdom prayers are prayers that extend the Kingdom of God. For example, “God please stop the killing of innocent babies by abortion.”

Kingdom prayers take an aspect that is right in the Kingdom of God—and then ask God to make it right here on earth.

**Practice it:** Following are a few Kingdom-prayer starters to try this week. Pray one each day, adding your personal

thoughts to the starter. Create Kingdom prayers of your own for the following:

- “God, please stop the terrible practice of sex trafficking in our country and our world.”
- “Father, please stop the human injustices carried out by North Korea.”
- “God, please help the American Church regain more passion for prayer.”
- “Lord, please raise up strong Christian leaders from among our young people to take the Church into the next generation.”

**You’ll know you have it when . . .** Kingdom praying is part of your regular prayer times.

## **4. Praying Jesus**

Have you ever thought about using the body of Jesus as prayer prompts—His eyes, ears, hands, arms, or feet? I have found great comfort in doing this as I pray over myself or others.

If you are in a situation where you don’t know what to do, for instance, pray like this, “Jesus, I know You can see things I will never see. So I am asking You to give me Your eyes in this situation so I will know what You want me to do—and do it with confidence.” Identify with Jesus in a personal way that prompts you to pray creatively.

**Practice it:** Pray for

- His ears to hear what only He can hear.
- His hands to help another.
- His feet to flee from temptation.
- His eyes to see the way He sees.
- His mind to give you the wisdom you need.
- His mind/thoughts to speak the right words.
- His smile to comfort another.
- His attitude in the midst of suffering.

**You'll know you have it when . . .** you find comfort in the presence of Jesus and all His abilities and personal characteristics.

## **Beyond the Routine**

This kind of variety can take prayers beyond the obvious “fix-this-or-that” approach. Use these prayer starters in groups to teach others to grow deeper in prayer.

Don't let your prayer life fall into a rut. Find creative ways to stretch your own prayer life and encourage others as you model fresh ways to pray.



—PAUL COVERT is an author who leads schools of prayer and prayer events across the U.S. and internationally. He consults with churches in the areas of prayer leadership and prayer strategy. The ideas in this article are taken from Paul's new book *52 Creative Ways to Pray* (PrayerShop Publishing 2018).

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# Loving Unity

## The Way to Breakthrough Praying

By John Robb



In John 17, in which Jesus prayed for the last time with His disciples before the crucifixion, He had every right to focus on His impending suffering, which would be terrible beyond belief. However, true to His nature, He rose above His own human fears to think about the welfare of His disciples and His followers of future generations. What was it He prayed for?

Unity—that we might be one as He and the Father are one. Wow!

Of course, such unity is a supernatural thing, only possible by the presence and enabling of the Holy Spirit. We humans tend to divide at the drop of a hat, dwelling on what our differences are. We compare ourselves and can split off from one another because of pride and feelings of superiority, thinking our doctrinal adherence or ministry practice surpasses that of other organizations and churches. Personality splits also exacerbate this phenomenon of division that has resulted in tens of thousands of separate denominations around the world.

I was recently blessed by Gaylord Enns's book, *Love Revolution*, that he gave the participants at the Transform USA



Prayer Summit. Enns maintains that Jesus' primary command gets lost in our effort to have the right beliefs about Him. That command is, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). That kind of love enables us to have real unity. Also, humility, realizing our many flaws and that we need each other, also enables such unity.

We, as the Apostle Paul so brilliantly teaches, are part of the organism called the Body of Christ, and each of us has particular gifts that are meant to benefit one another. Unless we exercise those gifts with the love and humility that comes out of the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, we are all impoverished, incomplete, and lacking. Only in that way of loving service to one another can we become One Body rather than remaining a deformed or handicapped body.

Such loving unity is fostered through prayer together. The early church quickly developed a culture of prayer at the command of Jesus that they should wait in Jerusalem. Acts 1:14 describes how they "all joined constantly together in prayer." Great breakthroughs came out of this culture of prayer as can be clearly traced throughout the book of Acts. The history of revivals and mission advances bear similar witness to the power of united prayer. Too often, we succumb to the mistaken idea that our activism is what will transform the world. Mission is a supernatural thing. It requires God's mighty moving to change hearts and societies that are in the grip of the prince of this world through enslaving spiritual forces of darkness and deceptive ideologies that bind and hinder humankind.

Over the last couple of decades, colleagues and I have found ourselves facilitating special prayer initiatives in the midst of awful, hopeless conflicts, especially in Africa of which there were 19 such conflicts raging in the mid-1990s and early years of this century. Over and over again, we witnessed the Lord graciously bring about peace breakthroughs and the ending of these wars as His people confessed corporate sin, got

reconciled with one another, and then prayed unitedly. Remarkably, it was often the next day or in a few days that we felt the atmosphere shift and a peace process was begun by the politicians and diplomats. In addition, spiritual revival or advances for the Gospel often also attended such amazing changes.

The re-establishment or beginning of new unity among His people was invariably the crucial thing that the Spirit of the Lord was seeking to bring about. After repentance for corporate sins and splits between church leaders were confessed with reconciliation and unity being reestablished, the participants could ask virtually anything and the Lord would grant it, even impossible things humanly like the ending of these hopeless ethnic conflicts that had gone on for many years, in some cases decades.

During a national prayer initiative for Germany and Berlin in 1997, significant division among leading pastors arose even though many were rejoicing that about 500 intercessors from 78 cities had come together, a real triumph for His church in the nation. I was wondering what to do and finally while on stage asked the participants to say this simple sentence to each other, which exemplifies the Spirit of Christ: "I want you to succeed more than myself."

This helped among other things to defuse the divisive, competitive atmosphere. Humility and love that is more concerned for the success of others comes out of the realization that the most important thing is not our individual accomplishments but rather our united functioning as members of His Body. It is that unity in prayer and the loving service that flows out of such praying that will bring His transformation to our world.

Let's therefore pray accordingly for ourselves and for the international prayer movement:

1. That we and other ministry leaders will maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and that Satan, the diabolos or one who divides, would be bound.

2. That we and others in Christ's Church will love one another as He has loved us. May we all experience a baptism or rebaptism of love in the Body of Christ.

3. That increasingly pastors and other ministry leaders will pray together across denominational boundaries for their cities and communities in every nation.

4. That this unity of the Spirit in prayer will result in the greatest and most pervasive global spiritual revival ever along with the fulfillment of the Great Commission—to reach the remaining 5500 unreached people groups still without movements to Christ and very little access to the Gospel.

John Robb is the chairman of the International Prayer Council and a member of America's National Prayer Committee. The IPC works to connect leaders and national prayer leaders around the world to encourage unified prayer efforts for important global issues and concerns. This originally appeared in the IPC's monthly newsletter "International Prayer Connections." We encourage you to sign up for this monthly email that will provide you with hot prayer topics from around the world.