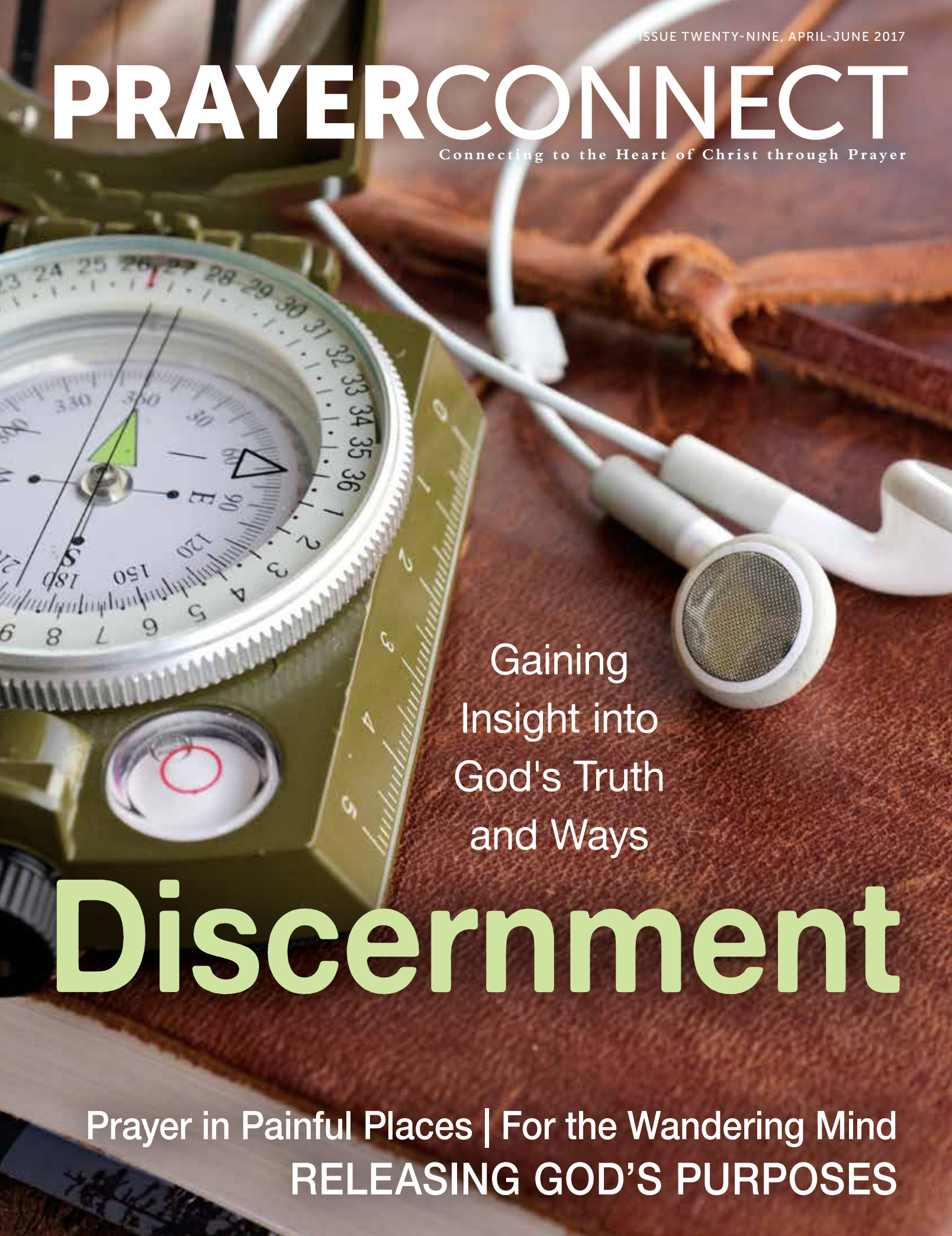


# PRAYERCONNECT

Connecting to the Heart of Christ through Prayer

A green military-style compass with a white face and black markings is positioned on the left. A white earbud with a mesh grille is on the right. A cinnamon stick lies diagonally across the top right. The background is a brown leather surface.

Gaining  
Insight into  
God's Truth  
and Ways

# Discernment

Prayer in Painful Places | For the Wandering Mind  
**RELEASING GOD'S PURPOSES**

2017

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# PRAYERCONNECT

April - June 2017 Vol. 7, No. 2

# 30

## Features

### 26 Targeted Prayers for Your Church

A Scripture-based Guide to Release God's Purposes

By Sandra Higley

### 30 Intercession in All Seasons of Life

Raising Up Prayer Warriors in Painful Places

By Rebecca Shirey



# 20

# Discernment

Gaining Insight into God's Truth and Ways, p. 9

### 10 The Practice of Discernment

Recognizing God's Voice and His Will

By Jamie Overholser

*Plus: Seven Discernment Prayers for Leadership Decisions by Kim Butts*

### 16 Hearing God's Voice in a Deceptive World

Staying Spiritually Balanced in Truth

By J. Lee Grady

### 20 Discerning the Times

Learn to Pray from Heaven's Perspective

By Bill Elliff

### 24 Bible Study

Gaining Insight into God's Ways

By Cynthia Hyle Bezek

# 10



## Departments

### 5 Publisher's Note

When You Get the Wind Knocked Out

### 6 News & Events

- Jericho March Prior to Inauguration
- National Prayer Committee Calls for Urgency
- Jesus Named "King of Poland"
- Revival Transforming New York City
- Muslims Plead with Jesus
- Cruz Joins Prayer on Capitol Hill
- Prayer Calendar

### 35 Prayer Leader

The Power of Family Prayer

### 37 Tips & Tools

- Concentrated Prayer for Wandering Minds
- Do Not Be Alarmed
- Will You Pray with Us?

### 39 Classics

True Revivals and the Way God Works



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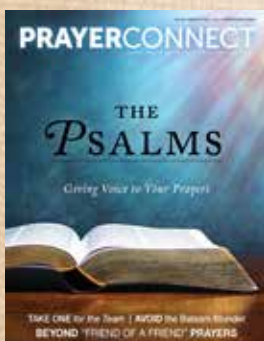
**Issue 23**  
**EMBRACING INTIMACY**  
Allowing God to Invade  
Your Prayer Life



**Issue 24**  
**LEADERS WHO PRAY**  
The Foundation to Building  
a Praying Church



**Issue 25**  
**THERE'S STILL HOPE**  
A Call for United Prayer  
for Our Elections



**Issue 26**  
**THE PSALMS**  
Giving Voice to Your Prayers



**Issue 27**  
**JOHN 17**  
Praying the Heart of Jesus



**Issue 28**  
**WATCH AND PRAY**  
Staying Alert in a Troubled World

**Issue 1** Can Prayer Save America?  
**Issue 2** Fresh Fire  
**Issue 4** As the Waters Cover the Sea  
**Issue 5** The Place Was Shaken  
**Issue 6** Stand Firm & Strong  
**Issue 7** Open Hearts, Open Doors  
**Issue 8** The Lord is Near  
**Issue 9** Releasing Children to Pray  
**Issue 10** Living in the Upper Room  
**Issue 12** Hope Undaunted

**Issue 13** Ask for the Nations  
**Issue 14** Help!  
**Issue 15** The Power of Praise  
**Issue 16** God Speaks  
**Issue 17** Roadblock Ahead  
**Issue 18** Faith and Prayer  
**Issue 19** Awakening on Campuses  
**Issue 20** Rediscovering Fasting  
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2. To resource prayer leaders and pastors with tools to help them motivate, disciple, and mobilize believers in churches to be a part of an army that seeks to pray the purposes of God for churches, communities, and the nations.
3. To be a unifying force between prayer ministries, community transformation groups, and churches.

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## Previously in Prayer Connect

It is both an assignment and a privilege for followers of Jesus to stay alert, watch carefully, and pray with urgency. We are called to be “watchmen on the walls” on behalf of our nation and world. The January–March 2017 issue, *Watch and Pray: Staying Alert in a Troubled World*, and other back issues are available at [prayerconnect.org](http://prayerconnect.org).



# PUBLISHER'S NOTE



## When You Get the Wind Knocked Out

**W**hen I was in my junior high years we lived in the small town of Sherrill, NY, on a street with nine guys within a year of each other in age. We had a lot of fun and got into some innocent trouble together. A great time in life!



I recall one night hanging out in the Swan boys' backyard, trying to think of something fun to do. They had a two-tiered yard with a small hedge between the two levels of ground. We got the idea of running at the hedges, jumping over them, and landing on the ground beyond—a drop of about three feet. From the point of leaping over the hedge to the bottom of the drop off was about five feet. We had fun doing this a number of times. But then the inevitable happened.

One time when I ran toward the hedge (probably getting a little tired and sloppy), I did not jump quite high enough. My foot caught the hedge. Rather than falling feet first, I landed with a thud directly on my chest and stomach. The wind got knocked out of me and I could not breathe. I still remember that awful feeling of lying there trying to gasp for air—any air. I thought I was going to die.

Of course, I eventually caught my breath. All was well until another day of shenanigans.

## Catch a Breath and Pray

I have recently found myself praying with the wind knocked out of me. You know those times. It's when things are not going well and you're attacked on every side. Every little thing goes wrong, and you feel like you can't catch a break (or a breath).

How do you pray and walk in faith during those seasons? How can you pray in a way that allows you to catch your breath, get up, and move forward?

Some people would advocate praying the Psalms during this time. Nothing wrong with that remedy. But for me, in this situation I go to a passage from one of Paul's letters:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Phil. 4:4–8).

Just as I had to force myself to try to breathe when I got the wind knocked out of me, I force myself in these challenging times to rejoice. I think of the good things I have, the things that are going well—and I begin to praise Jesus for those things. It is amazing how this simple practice can fill your spiritual lungs with air again. Try it. You'll breathe again!

—Jonathan Graf





## Jericho March Prior to Inauguration

Intercessors gathered in Washington, D.C., prior to the Presidential Inauguration on January 20 to pray and participate in a week-long “Jericho march” around the White House and the U.S. Capitol grounds. Sponsored by Intercessors for America (IFA, [ifapray.org](http://ifapray.org)), the prayerwalk was intended to highlight the transition of power to President Donald Trump and his administration.

“We sit upon a wonderful opportunity that the Lord has given us through this past election season,” says David Kubal, IFA president. “Now we must take advantage of that opportunity by battling in the spiritual realm to attain the victories He has for us. This is not unlike the days of young Israel when the people sought to occupy the land the Lord had given them. They approached

the walled, battle-hardened city of Jericho, and then the Lord gave the battle strategy [Josh. 6:2–5].”

Christians gathered in D.C. to pray in organized teams around the nation's capital for seven days (from Jan. 14–20). Various ministries giving leadership to each day of the prayerwalk included National Day of Prayer, Aglow, and Capitol Prayer Partners.

The prayer efforts then culminated in a “mighty shout” during the applause following President Trump's taking the oath of office on January 20. IFA encouraged believers around the country to do the same thing as they watched the Inauguration ceremony live on television. Hundreds of intercessors also joined on a national prayer call during the Inauguration—and then shouted simultaneously



after the oath for “spiritual walls to be destroyed at that moment.”

“For too long, our adversary has built mighty walls around our elected officials in Washington,” says Kubal. Intercessors were encouraged to declare “the coming presence of our Lord and destruction of the walls of protection around those who oppose Him.”

Intercessors for America also launched a website and initiative on January 20 called “Pray for America's Leaders” ([prayforamericasleaders.com](http://prayforamericasleaders.com)) that provides a sign-up process and resources to pray for leaders and upcoming legislation.

## National Prayer Committee Calls for Urgency

Members of America's National Prayer Committee (NPC) met in late January in San Diego, CA, to pray, share reports, and envision the coming years in the prayer movement.

Several of the national prayer leaders reflected on the increased level of prayer in 2016, especially leading up to the elections. Dave Butts, NPC chairman, told the group, “I believe the prayer movement is on the verge of explosion. We've never seen anything like what we've seen in the last year.”

“And we are starting even better in 2017,” he added. “I've not seen the let-down that I've seen in other seasons [of prayer].” Butts challenged prayer leaders to repent of not praying for the past administration as they perhaps should have—and then pray for the Church to rise to the

challenge of a new window of opportunity to see revival in the nation.

“God is calling us right now to be the greatest generation,” he said. “We may have limited time to cry out to God for His mercy—and it's going to cost us. Revival always costs and takes you out of your comfort zone.”

David Kubal of Intercessors for America, a ministry in the Washington, D.C., area, observed that “enduring desperation has grown over the past eight years. People are now willing to continue to pray and intercede with the view of hope.” He described the increase of technology (websites, Twitter, Facebook) that allows for the Trump administration to be the most prayed-for administration in history. Websites such as [prayasone.org](http://prayasone.org) and [prayforamericasleaders.com](http://prayforamericasleaders.com) are

examples of sites that promote strategic national prayer.

Anne Graham Lotz, chairperson of the National Day of Prayer, spoke to the group about the pattern of prayer found in Daniel 9–10. Lotz urged NPC members not to become discouraged about praying for revival, recognizing that there is “a delay right now of severe judgment. We need healing in our land even more than we did two weeks ago!”

Prayer initiatives in Washington, D.C., in the coming year include:

May 4: The National Day of Prayer

October 6–9: Awaken the Dawn, which includes a plan for 50 prayer tents (one for each state) to be set up on the National Mall for continuous worship and prayer—pointing toward the completion of the Great Commission.

## Jesus Named “King of Poland”

Jesus was declared “King of Poland” in November in a prayer ceremony that coincided with the end of the Catholic Church’s Jubilee Year of Mercy and the 1,050th anniversary of Polish Christianity. Poland’s president Andrzej Duda attended the ceremony in Krakow.

“In our hearts, rule us, Christ! In our families, rule us, Christ! . . . In our schools and universities, rule us, Christ,” the ceremony’s prayer said. “Through

the Polish nation, rule us, Christ! . . . We pledge to defend your holy worship and preach Thy royal glory, Christ our King, we promise.

“We entrust the Polish people and Polish leaders to you. Make them exercise their power fairly and in accordance with your laws. . . . rule us, Christ! Reign in our homeland and reign in every nation—for the greater glory of the Most Holy Trinity and the salvation of mankind.”

## Revival Transforming New York City

New York City is undergoing a transformation. In 1989, less than one percent of New Yorkers attended church. That number has since grown to five percent, with a significant increase in just the past five years.

According to well-known church planter Tim Keller, senior pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, when a minority group reaches around 15 percent of the population, it becomes a movement.

If true, New York City could be a majority Christian city by the year 2026. Millennials make up the fastest-growing segment of the church-going population. Churches like C3 Brooklyn are growing and thriving. C3 rents out the Williamsburg Music Hall every Sunday morning. The bar area downstairs is covered in black sheets and used for the nursery. It’s just one of the booming congregations that make up the new way NYC “does church.”

—Adapted from *Charisma News*

## Muslims Plead with Jesus

Thousands of Muslims disillusioned by the violence and unrest in Mosul—ISIS’s last stronghold in Iraq—are embracing Christianity and “begging” Christ for healing after experiencing the love of Christ and hearing the truth of the gospel.

A ministry director working in northern Iraq’s autonomous region of Kurdistan told Christian Aid Mission that for more than two years his organization has been distributing Bibles, leading Bible studies, and holding discipleship training sessions for displaced people.

He said that before ISIS seized Mosul

in 2014, it had the reputation as the Iraqi city most closed to the gospel. However, triggered by the lack of freedom in Islam and gratitude to Christians offering help to refugees fleeing war-torn countries, thousands have turned to Christianity.

“So now they see the true face of Islam, they saw the teachings of Islam, and they know what it means to be under the Islamic State,” he said. “I believe a lot of heart-breaking stories will come out of Mosul with people who are ready to leave Islam and beg for Christ to take their lives and give them healing.”

—Adapted from *The Gospel Herald Ministries*

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## Cruz Joins Prayer on Capitol Hill

Presidential candidate Ted Cruz led in prayer at a gathering with conservative pastors and members of Congress on Capitol Hill after the November elections.

The prayer was organized by Wall-builders (run by David Barton) and the

Jefferson Gathering (a prayer organization developed by Skyline Church, with lead pastor Jim Garlow). Pastor Dave Walker of the Tennessee Pastors Network and Dave Kistler of the North Carolina Pastors Network also participated in the event.

“Senator Ted Cruz was eloquent as



Photo by Jim Garlow

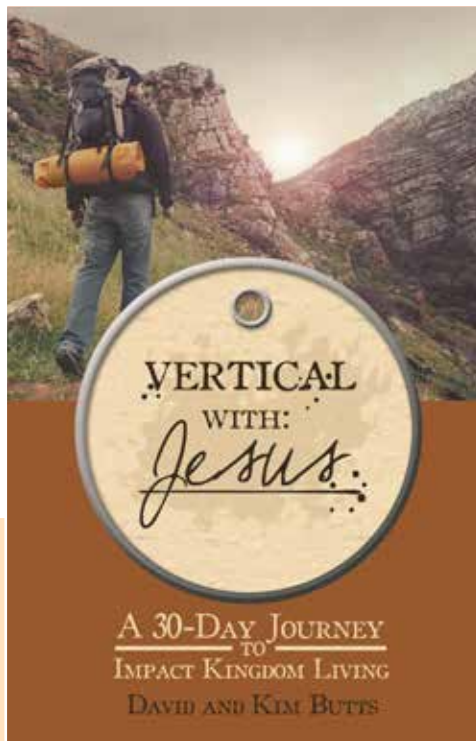
usual.” Garlow wrote on Facebook. “He came through a bruising election—and continues to be a profound and significant voice in the Senate. Thank God for him!”

The group prayed in the Kennedy Caucus Room in the Capitol and in the U.S. Senate Chamber. Rep. Louie Gohmert also gave leadership. “We got on our knees . . .” Kistler says, “and it sounded almost like a labor room as people were crying out to God for the revival that Senate Chaplain Barry Black believes is coming and that we believe is coming. To do that in the Senate chamber was an absolutely astounding opportunity.”

—Adapted from *Breaking Christian News*

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## Prayer Calendar

Seek God for the City  
**March 1–April 9, 2017**  
[waymakers.org](http://waymakers.org)

National Day of Prayer  
**Thursday, May 4**  
[nationaldayofprayer.org](http://nationaldayofprayer.org)

Weekend of Prayer for  
Children at Risk  
**June 3-4**  
[viva.org/pray](http://viva.org/pray)

Global Day of Prayer  
**June 4**  
[globaldayofprayer.com](http://globaldayofprayer.com)

30 Days of Prayer for  
Muslim World  
**May 27-June 25**  
[30daysprayer.com](http://30daysprayer.com)





Theme Introduction

## Gaining Insight into God's Truth and Ways

# Discernment

**A** generous friend offered her family's condominium for me to stay in while I attended a conference in Arizona. It was a beautiful and comfortable place a few miles out in the desert. I enjoyed the peace and quiet, but something didn't feel right. Some unknown thing was bothering me. I couldn't sleep, and in general I felt uncomfortable.

I finally asked the Lord to show me what was going on. A few minutes later I walked by the guest bathroom—and a piece of wall art caught my attention. Everything in my spirit seemed to confirm there was something spiritually unholy about the artifact. I prayed a prayer of cleansing—and felt a sense of relief.

I was still clueless about it until I walked through the airport on my way home, and saw a book about that exact artifact on display in one of the shops. I skimmed the book and discovered its historic and demonic roots.

*Now what?* I thought. *It's probably a very expensive art piece. Do I say something?*

When I called my friend to thank her for the use of the condo, I hesitated for a moment, then described my spiritually uncomfortable feeling.

Before I could even tell her what I discovered, she exclaimed, "It's the art piece in the guest bathroom, isn't it?"

She then asked why I didn't take it off the wall immediately and throw it out. Um, I might have been fairly certain the Lord was speaking to me—but I wasn't *that* confident!

### Discerning God's Voice

I'm not one to say easily, "God told me." But there have been many moments in my life when God's voice has been clear. On occasion His voice has come to me as a precise thought or sentence that has run through my mind. Other times specific Scriptures seem to throw a spotlight on something. The words and truths match with things I have been wondering, wrestling, and praying about.

Sometimes people have spoken words into my life—and I have cautiously paid attention but asked God to confirm. Other times I've had thoughts that seem crazy, but I write them in my journal, hold them close and privately in my heart, then seek God for further insight.

Of course, there are convicting moments when the Spirit highlights an area in my life that I need to

confess as sin. And sometimes I don't know *what* is wrong about a person or situation—I just know something is not right!

A critical part of discernment is being open to the idea that God is eager to speak. But the discipline of discernment is learning to wait, test, and trust God to reveal His truth in His time.

In this issue, Jamie Overholser defines *discern* as learning to examine or investigate the best way forward according to God's direction. Unfortunately, many people fail to inquire of the Lord—and so their best efforts are no more than human decision-making. J. Lee Grady warns that believers need to be on guard spiritually because the potential for deception, both in the world and in the church, is increasing. Bill Elliff writes about the importance of leaders interpreting our current reality according to heaven's perspective. In all of these ways, discernment takes practice!

I'm still not confident enough to start taking art off the walls in my friends' homes. But I pray that I am growing in my discernment of God's voice in my life. I'm listening because I know He speaks.

**CAROL MADISON** is editor of *Prayer Connect* magazine.



Recognizing  
God's Voice and  
His Will

# The Practice of

# Discernm



**T**he frustration of trying to discern God's will sometimes feels like the frustration many of us experience when someone sets a timer and places a Rubik's cube in our hands.

But Scripture tells us this: "God does speak—now one way, now another—though no one perceives it" (Job 33:14). There are two underlying truths here:

1. God speaks in multiple ways.
2. We don't always recognize it.

In this passage, Job's friend Elihu admitted the great tension in discernment: we are not always attuned to God's voice.

## What Does God Sound Like?

So, where *is* God expressive in our lives? How does He communicate with us from day to day? I am not asking, "Does God answer your prayers or does He respond to your list of requests?" It goes far beyond that.

Where is God animated in your life? Where is He easy to read? What does He sound like? What does He say? How is Jesus "the Word" to you?

If we are to be discerning people, we have to be convinced that God is still actively speaking into our lives on a variety of levels. In his book *Hearing God*, Dallas Willard wrote, "Christians are not just people who believe certain things *about* the Bible. They are also people who *lead* the kind of life demonstrated in the

*Bible*: a life of personal, intelligent interaction with God."<sup>1</sup>

Adam and Eve conversed with God in the garden. Moses had multiple conversations with God. The Lord called to young Samuel during the night and spoke to him. Elijah heard that still, small whisper. The apostle Paul was taken away for three years into the desert where he interacted personally with Jesus. The disciples had a give-and-take, back-and-forth interaction as a part of their discipleship experience. There are multiple occasions in Scripture when "David inquired of the LORD" and "the LORD answered him." This happened a lot when David was contemplating going to war against his enemies. He consistently asked God if he should, then waited for God to tell him how to do it. And it wasn't always the same way every time. God would give different instructions depending on the situation.

But what do we do? We tend to default to what God said previously and then just do it that way every time! In doing so we fail to "inquire of the Lord"; we fail to discern each situation. God may want us to approach each circumstance differently.

## Inquiring of the Lord

Paul said, "This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:9–10).

In an attempt to get our minds around what discernment means,

**By Jamie Overholser**

# Seven Discernment Prayers for Leadership Decisions

By Kim Butts

Leaders need to seek the presence of God *together* to discern His agenda, answers, plans, and purposes. Often we ask God to bless what we are planning, what we have already planned, or what we have decided and discerned apart from Him. God can lead us best when we make *His* glory our ultimate corporate goal and settle for nothing less.

Here are seven types of prayer to incorporate into our discernment process:

## 1. Prayer of Intercession

“While Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples’” (Luke 11:1, NASB).

Ask God to make you and your fellow leaders people of prayer, depending upon God to reveal His purposes and plans. Repent of any prayerlessness individually and corporately. Praying with and for one another throughout a season of discernment is paramount and will help overcome obstacles.

## 2. Prayer of Listening

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (Ps. 46:10).

The prayer of listening helps leaders stay attentive to God’s continual presence. In an age of noise and distraction, it is difficult to be attuned to His voice alone. Not everything you hear needs to be directly related to the “issue” at hand. However, learning to hear together is an important practice.

## 3. Prayer of Thanksgiving

“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2, NASB).

Thankfulness is a posture of prayer that is often overlooked—especially during difficult or uncertain circumstances. As the discernment process takes shape, it is important to give thanks every step of the way. You may wish to come back to this place often as the Holy Spirit brings your hearts into alignment, and as you make progress toward clarity.

## 4. Prayer of Submission

“We humans keep brainstorming options and plans, but God’s purpose prevails” (Prov. 19:21, MSG).

The prayer of submission says, “Not my will but Yours be done.” This prayer will likely take significant time as deeply held desires, dreams, or ideas need to be released to God. It may require returning to this place of prayer several times before every person on the team grasps the significance of dying to self and self’s “great ideas” in the topic at hand.

## 5. Prayer of Humility

“Learn to put aside your own desires so that you will become patient and godly, gladly letting God have his way with you” (2 Peter 1:6, TLB).

The prayer of humility wrestles with *letting go* of the “my way is best” mentality. This prayer puts leaders on the same page together, willing to hear the Father tell them His plans and purposes.

Perhaps the simplest prayer for individuals and/or the corporate team to pray is this: “Lord, help me/us to release

my/our grip on \_\_\_\_\_, which is keeping me/us from moving forward towards aligning myself/ourselves with Your plans and purposes for \_\_\_\_\_.”

## 6. Prayer of Wisdom

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind” (James 1:5-6).

The wisdom of this world is, as 1 Corinthians 3:19 teaches, foolishness to God. Yet so often we seek our wisdom from worldly places rather than from the heart of God. It is important to notice and acknowledge when we’re seeking answers first from places or people other than the Father. Although other sources can certainly inform our decisions, we need to listen to the Father *first*.

## 7. Prayer of Unity

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

Godly discernment takes place in complete unity about the perfect will of the Father rather than staying attached to personal agendas or ideas. There may be times when people can “agree to disagree” about nonessentials and still move forward with unity. As you and your team pray for unity of heart, mind, and purpose, the Holy Spirit will be at work to bring you to a well-discerned decision.

**KIM BUTTS** is co-founder of Harvest Prayer Ministries ([harvestprayer.com](http://harvestprayer.com)) and author of several books available at [prayershop.org](http://prayershop.org).



let's start here: *Discern*, in its simplest form, means to examine or investigate with the goal of approving which way is best. Paul knew that knowledge and depth of insight are crucial in examining and investigating what is best.

Many people do this nonchalantly. They try to make the best decisions about such things as what car to buy, where to go on vacation, what job to take, what kind of dog to adopt, how many kids to have, what to spend their money on, who to be friends with, what church to go to, and what ministries to be involved with. We normally do it on a pros-and-cons basis—and most of the time it doesn't seem all that spiritual.

In other words, my guess is that many times we do not inquire of the Lord. We're not sure we really want to hear His voice, mainly because of what we might hear! But if we do not inquire of the Lord, it is not discernment; it is just plain old human decision-making.

And if we do inquire of the Lord in those moments of frantic indecision, it's most likely several quick, desperate prayers for wisdom from on high or for God to write something in the sky. But as G.K. Chesterton said, "You cannot grow a beard in a moment of passion."<sup>2</sup>

In other words, when our human process of decision-making breaks down, we often remember one last resort: a few anxious prayers in God's general direction, thinking that will do the trick and we will suddenly hear the clear, articulate, undeniable voice of God. Or, when confronted with a decision, we glibly use the phrase, "I'll pray about that." But we don't understand that if a person is not living a prayerful life to begin with, "I'll pray about that" sounds good but is a poor substitute for spiritual discernment.

## Practice Makes Better

Becoming practiced in hearing the nuances of how God expresses Himself to us is part of our continuing spiritual formation. It's a critical part of the

maturing process that takes our prayer life from snorkeling to scuba diving. It will be very difficult to hear God on the big things in life if we have not practiced on the smaller things.

Romans 12:2 offers some key insight as we venture into this spiritual territory. Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the

renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (ESV). Do you know why God does not write stuff in the sky? Do you know why He doesn't just tell us what to do? He wants us to discern what His will is. He wants our interaction.

And notice what it begins with:

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# Discernment is chasing after what pleases the Lord.

transformation. One of the primary steps in discernment is simply an ongoing spiritual transformation and mind renewal. This will continuously lead us out of the world's operating procedures and lead us into the way the Kingdom of God works. Greek scholar Spiros Zodhiates translates it this way: "Stop being molded by the external and fleeting fashions of this age, but undergo a deep inner change." *Then* you will be able to discern what God's will is for you.

If that is true—and it is—then the converse must be true as well. If you are being molded by the external and fleeting fashions of this age, and you are *not* undergoing deep inner change, then you will not be able to discern what God's will is for you. Try as you may, true spiritual discernment will elude you.

## In or Out of the Speck

So how do we discern God's voice? Growing up I was taught that God's will is like a tiny speck on a piece of paper and that I had to be in the middle of that speck at all times. That's a bit of an exaggeration, but that's what it felt like. My spiritual leaders called it being "in the center of God's perfect will."

It drove me to live in fear for a good portion of my life. I was never sure if I was in the middle of the speck because the percentages were against me. I was more likely to be outside of the speck than be directly in the middle of it. There was way too much white space compared to the speck!

I would try to search for that peace you're supposed to feel when you are in the middle of God's will. I knew the saying about not being in His will: "I didn't have peace about it."

The fact that Jonah—a Jew from the nation of Israel—ran the opposite direction surely indicates that he didn't have peace about God telling him to go to Nineveh (modern-day northern Iraq). He feared pronouncing gloom and doom on his enemies if they didn't repent. But we all know it *was* God's will. Be careful how you play the "peace card." Peace is a gift from God that transcends our human understanding. When there is an inner stillness and calm *in the midst of* the uncertainty of God's will, you have peace. Peace usually comes after you've said yes to God, not before.

Paul writes, "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord" (Eph. 5:8–10). This is far different than trying to find the center of the speck. Paul offers much freedom in what he says here. "Live as children of light." Live a life that produces

goodness, righteousness, and truth. Go out and discern (find out) what pleases God within the boundaries of all that is good, righteous, and true.

We are not trying to decipher the hidden speck. God does not play games with us. He is not sneaky or coy. He does not sit back and expect us to find the proverbial needle in a haystack called His will. Instead, discernment is chasing after what pleases the Lord. And there is a lot that pleases Him—as long as we are living in the light and producing fruit that consists of goodness, righteousness, and truth. Discernment should not be fear-based but adventure-based!

## Free to Live Freely

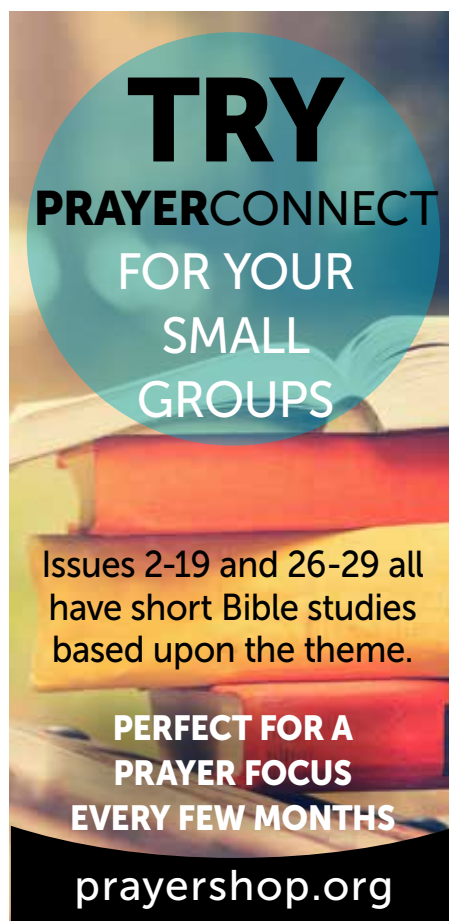
I love the analogy Dallas Willard uses. Life in the Kingdom of God is like a child playing in the backyard after her mother chases her out of the house on a warm, sunny day. She is free within the confines of the yard. She can swing, she can play in the sandbox, she can shoot baskets, she can play hide-and-seek with her friends, or she can simply lie in the grass and soak up the warmth of the sun. She has freedom to choose without having to go ask her mother every time she wants to change activities.

Oh, to live life that free! Discernment is not like solving a Rubik's cube before the time runs out. It's not about the speck. It's about pursuing goodness, righteousness, and truth.

That's where I want to be. **PC**

<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Intimacy with God* (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 137.

<sup>2</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles* (Digireads.com Publishing, 2011), 40.



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**JAMIE OVERHOLSER** is lead pastor at Crossroads Church, Clarks Summit, PA, and founder and director of The Jacob Institute, a learning community that seeks restoration of the heart, increased hunger and thirst for Jesus, and the fullness of relationship with Him in His Kingdom ([jacob.institute](http://jacob.institute)).



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# Hearing God's Vo

Staying Spiritually Balanced in Truth

# in a Deceptive World



# ice

In desperation a friend contacted me one day, worried that his son might be under the influence of a Christian ministry with questionable doctrines. The leader of the ministry preaches that any church that doesn't experience regular healings isn't following the true Jesus. This leader also claims that only his small congregation has an inside track with God.

We're thankful that my friend's son finally discerned something was off track.

Jesus warned that even His followers would be vulnerable to deception. In describing the last days, He said, "False messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24). The apostle Paul issued a similar warning, saying that even Christians "will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:4).

So how do we guard ourselves against false teaching and false spirituality? This is especially important for those of us who are intercessors. Prayer is a wonderful gift, but those who engage in intercession can also be vulnerable to spiritual attack. God tells us to be watchful so we won't fall into spiritual pride or deception.

## Clear Deception Signs

In my years of ministry I've identified several clear signs that a ministry has veered away from the truth. Here are the most obvious:

**1. Lack of spiritual accountability.** Healthy leaders know they need to surround themselves with mentors and advisers who can question them if they step out of line. Proverbs 11:14 says, "In an abundance of counselors there is safety" (ESV). But if you are following teachers, pastors, prophets, or apostles who have not submitted themselves to any form of accountability, you are asking for trouble. Never align yourself with a Lone Ranger, no matter how fiery those sermons are.

The same principle applies to all of us: Never, ever run a ministry without the solid counsel and accountability of godly advisers. "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

**2. Overemphasis on money.** You would think we would have learned this by now, after so many charlatans have conned people out of their life savings to build their mansions. But the Church today is still vulnerable to the extremes of financial shenanigans. Godly leaders always call people to fund the work of the church and gospel outreach. Unhealthy leaders, to the contrary, manipulate people in order to line their own pockets. Don't be charmed when preachers make outlandish promises about good things that will happen if you give to them.

**3. An elitist attitude.** All believers in Jesus are part of the Body of Christ. Yet Christians who experience certain gifts or manifestations of the Holy Spirit are sometimes tempted to think they are superior. If they aren't careful, this subtle spiritual pride can morph into a dangerous elitism.

By J. Lee Grady

Suddenly they believe they are God's favorites, with special access to revelation that no one else knows and authority no one else has.

Some ministries today claim to have inside information about end-times prophecy and the return of Jesus. In some cases they convince people to store up food and even guns to prepare for Armageddon. Back in the 1980s, a preacher named Charles Meade convinced many people to follow him to Florida, where his church taught that only those who aligned themselves with Meade's group would survive the last days. Don't let anyone suck you into this kind of cultic mindset.

**4. A spirit of control among followers.** A mature leader knows the members of his church don't belong to him. But some insecure and untrained pastors use manipulation and threats to keep their members loyal. True pastors don't have to constantly teach on spiritual authority to win the support of their flocks. A controlling leader constantly emphasizes that he is in charge, and he demands total submission. This mindset can lead to serious spiritual abuse.

**5. Constant talk of miracles with no documentation.** There is a great hunger today in the Body of Christ for the miraculous. But in the rush to see God's power displayed, some people fall into the trap of hyping, sensationalizing, or even faking miracles to get attention. This never bears good fruit.

In 2008, thousands of people traveled to Lakeland, FL, to witness a "revival" that was supposedly marked by nightly miracles. Yet many of the healings that were announced from the pulpit were never verified. And the whole thing abruptly ended when the evangelist leading those meetings admitted to adultery.

**6. Strange revelations that lack biblical basis.** The apostle Paul warned us that waves of deception would affect the church. "The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine . . . They will turn their ears away from the truth" (2 Tim. 4:3–4). Never follow

preachers who claim "inside information" from God that no one else knows. Don't be mesmerized by their teachings—even if they claim they received those teachings in a supernatural vision.

The test of truth is not how spooky-spiritual something sounds, but whether it is in line with God's Word. Many false prophets can say, "God showed me this," but they are lying if their message contradicts Scripture. If something sounds really off when you hear it, don't ignore your gut feelings. God gives discernment, and we must learn to use this important spiritual gift.

## Getting Back to the Basics

The Bible promises that God will guide us. But many Christians find it difficult to hear God's voice. And in some churches we complicate things when we try to make guidance mystical or weird—as if you have to hear an audible voice from heaven about what color shirt to wear.

When the world—and the church—go crazy, we must go back to the basics and learn to hear God's voice with clarity. Years ago I learned from author Henry Blackaby about four distinct ways we receive divine guidance:

**1. We can hear God's voice by reading the Bible.** Friends have sometimes complained to me, "I just never hear God speaking." Yet when I ask if they read the Bible regularly, they say they're too busy.

God supernaturally inspired 40 authors over a period of 1,600 years to compile His love letter to us. After the Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek, many people were martyred because they translated it into a modern language. God went to a lot of trouble to compile the Bible. Yet today Bibles are collecting dust in the homes of people who are too busy to read God's most direct message!

When we read Scripture with a prayerful heart, God can cause a verse to jump off the page as a direct message to us. British preacher Charles Spurgeon recognized this years ago when he wrote, "When I

have been in trouble, I have read the Bible until a text has seemed to stand out of the Book and salute me, saying, 'I was written specially for you.'"<sup>1</sup> Expect God to speak directly to you from Scripture.

When I was in my 20s I was praying about whether I should enroll in graduate school. Then one morning in my devotional time I came to Psalm 32:8 and it seemed to be flashing like a neon sign. It said: "*I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go*" (NASB, emphasis added).

The Holy Spirit was showing me that God would teach me and that I didn't need additional schooling. That's not to say graduate school is wrong for everyone else; it was just not God's plan for me at that time. God used a Scripture to clearly show me what path I should take.

**2. We can hear God's voice through the supernatural inspiration of the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit is not an eerie presence that just hangs around. He lives in every born-again Christian, and He comforts us and actively speaks to us. He can do this in many ways: through dreams, visions, warnings, a sense of conviction, or—most often—through what we know as the "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12, KJV) of the Spirit.

I have had prophetic dreams and visions over the years, but the most common way the Spirit speaks to me is through a deep sense of inward knowing. I will never forget a time in 1985 when God spoke to me while I was driving my car in Florida. A message came to me, not audibly but in my spirit: "You will move to Washington, D.C." It seemed to come out of the blue, and I knew it did not originate with me. Four years later I was offered a job in the D.C. area, and I worked there for three years.

The ability to hear the Spirit's voice is developed over years as we grow in Christ. If we really want to hear Him, we will ask God to fill us with His Spirit. As we allow more of the Spirit's presence and power in our lives, we will set aside our selfish



agendas and sinful habits so God can communicate without any hindrance.

**3. We can hear God's voice through people.** God never intended for us to live in isolation. We will hear God better when we are in fellowship with His people. God can speak to us through a pastor's sermon, a friend's wise counsel, a mother's rebuke, a mentor's phone call, or a prophetic word given to us by one of God's Spirit-filled servants.

God uses the gift of prophecy, but we should never chase after prophecies. I know Christians who will travel across the country to attend a prophetic conference to get a word from God, yet they have not read the Bible in months or sat still long enough to hear from God on their own. Never treat the holy gift of prophecy like fortune-telling. When God needs to speak to us in an unusual way, He has faithful messengers who will deliver it to us at the exact time we need it.

**4. We can hear God's voice through circumstances.** God is sovereign. He has power over nature, government leaders, and all the details of our lives. He opens doors that no man can shut. If you have been praying about getting a job at one company and suddenly you get an offer at a different company, this may be God's sign that He has a better place for you.

My oldest daughter wanted to attend a college in Tennessee, and we were praying about her decision. Right after we prayed I got a call from the president of a college in Georgia. He was inviting me to speak at the school, but in our conversation I learned that this school was willing to offer my daughter a scholarship. She ended up enrolling in that school, meeting her future husband there, and graduating four years later. God was totally involved in that phone call from Georgia!

## Truth or Error

Do you want God to give you discernment to avoid falling into the kind of error my friend's son nearly did?

Ask God to tune your ears to His

voice in a fresh way. Guidance is not complicated when you sincerely want to hear Him speak.

Don't be deceived. If you are a follower of Christ, God has equipped you with an internal alarm system to warn you about any unhealthy teaching or ministry.

Listen to the Holy Spirit, who is called the Spirit of truth (John 16:13). He can give you the discernment to know the

difference between truth and error. **PC**

<sup>1</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*.



**J. LEE GRADY** is director of The Mordecai Project, a ministry that is confronting the abuse of women and girls globally. He is also the author of six books including *Set My Heart on Fire*, a Bible study on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. You can learn more about his ministry at [themordecaiproject.org](http://themordecaiproject.org).

**America is in a downward spiral spiritually and morally.  
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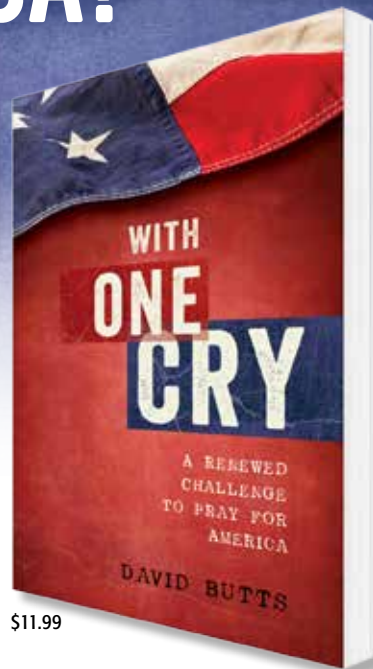
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# Discerning the Times



**S**o there I sat in a small auditorium with 100 people in Dallas, TX, in the early '70s. I was a college student whose heart had been radically affected by Christ during the spiritual intensity of the Jesus Movement.

We were watching the premiere of a new film series about God and culture. After each segment, a small man with a white beard and knickers would come out on the stage, sit on a stool, and tell us where the world was headed. The man was L'Abri ministry founder Francis Schaeffer, author of *How Should We Then Live?*

I was shocked. He spoke of the horror of something called “abortion.” (I had to ask my brother what that was.) He educated us about euthanasia, the decline of democracy, and the ways art and entertainment reflect in advance where society is headed. It was eye popping and tragically prophetic.

As I take a 45-year glance back at that moment in my life, I am even more astounded at the accuracy of his insights. Schaeffer discerned the times.

### **Value of Discernment**

A leader is one who sees ahead. He or she has the foresight—however gained—to see where a family, an organization, a business, a church, or a movement is going (or could go). Discerning leaders anticipate the coming waves and know how to take people through them.

For followers of Christ, such spiritual leadership is invaluable. Scan your Bible. You will see that the men and women God used to change their world also had the ability to see ahead. They understood the times.

Discerning prophets warned people. And their warnings, if heeded, saved whole nations. Joseph had dreams that delivered the known world, including his own family. David stayed one step ahead of a murderous Saul. Elijah saw “horses and chariots of fire,” a heavenly sighting that brought peace to his servant and deliverance to his people (2 Kings 6:15–17).

Fast forward to the New Testament. Peter and John discerned that a lame man did not need silver and gold but healing and redemption (Acts 3:1–10). How did they know that? Why didn't they just throw him a few shekels? They knew the potential for this man's life.

God led Ananias to help liberate one who would become the greatest apostle—the former hate-spewing Saul, turned Paul (Acts 9:10–19). And in the Book of Revelation John tells us that while exiled on an island, he saw a vision that still guides believers and will do so until the end of time.

They all saw ahead—and led accordingly.

Discernment is indispensable for prayer. Effective intercessors, in tune with God's understanding, don't waste their prayers. They get in the loop of Spirit-initiated intercession in such ways that their prayers help God's “kingdom come and [His]

## **By Bill Elliff**



will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

How many of us have heard prayers—or prayed prayers—that were not in line with God’s agenda? We often move our mouths in prayer even when we are clueless about the realities in both heaven and earth. God must shake His head at times and let our prayers go unanswered.

God has given us everything we need to see ahead. But we must use these incredibly effective tools if we are to pray and live aright.

## Understand God’s Ways

We all have a discernible way about ourselves. “He’s always like that,” you might say of a friend. In the same way, God wants us to know Him, His character, and His ways. He has shown us His ways throughout human history. In order to know Him better, He has recorded these

ways and thoughts in Scripture. We can observe many of His standard operating procedures, even though He tells us that His ways are higher than ours (Is. 55:9).

David was a great, discerning leader because he was a student of God’s ways. Listen to his prayers for understanding:

- “Show me Your ways, LORD, teach me your paths” (Ps. 25:4).
- “I will remember the deeds of the LORD . . . I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds” (Ps. 77:11–12).
- “I meditate on your precepts and consider [look upon] your ways” (Ps. 119:15).

How can you discern the times? *Read your Bible!* Read it thoroughly, prayerfully, daily—and seek to know the ways of God and man. Then interpret everything that is happening around you in light of God’s ways.

When I observe an event in the news, I often think, *If that event were placed in the middle of the Old Testament, what would we conclude about God’s agenda?*

For instance, how did we interpret what happened in our nation on 9/11? Was it a mere act of evil men? Or was it a result of our rebellion and the removal of God’s protecting hand? God is not evil, but He does allow evil men to do what evil men do—if we as a nation continue to refuse Him. Perhaps it was a call to repentance, but how many discerned that?


Do you know what is happening in our nation right now? Are you praying rightly? God has given us what we need in His Word to be like the men of Issachar who “understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chron. 12:32). God did not give us His Word merely to help us devotionally but to equip us for insightful, discerning intercession that moves heaven and earth *when* we become students of His ways!

## Pray by God-initiation

Every follower of Christ lives in two worlds, whether they realize it or not. Once we were aligned only to the material world. Now, we can see both material and spiritual. Before Christ, we were “dead in [our] transgressions and sins” and “followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Eph. 2:1–2). But now God has “rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (Col. 1:13).

Because of this real-time dual citizenship, we have discernment ability unlike those without Christ. We now have heaven’s perspective. Paul tells us what this advantage brings:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.



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When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Col. 3:1–4).

Do you understand what this means? You can peer into heaven! In fact, you are there right now—and prayer and the Word of God are the 3-D glasses that give you the ability to see what is happening in heaven. By God’s initiative, we can see what God thinks, feels, desires, and plans.

Not only can we observe heaven, we can also see earth from heaven’s perspective. We have new eyes, like Elijah seeing the horses and chariots in the spiritual realm. The heavenly horses were real but only discernible with spiritual eyes. When Elijah saw this reality, it changed everything in his responses, prayers, and behavior. He saw ahead.

Jesus, while on earth as a man, showed us how this works. He modeled for us how we can have the discernment that leads to effective cooperation with God and usefulness in His Kingdom. Listen to His words:

- “By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me” (John 5:30).
- “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me” (John 8:28).
- “I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken” (John 12:49).
- “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work” (John 14:10).

We can live (and pray) by Divine initiation! Think of how this “loop” of prayer works. Abiding in Christ, we tune our heart by His Spirit and Word to heaven. This is why walking in sync with Christ

with no interference is so important!

We look around this world at what is happening—in our families, church, government, etc.—and then look around heaven, asking God to show us what He thinks and desires so we can pray effectively. God shows us the spiritual realities of what is occurring, and He directs us, by His Spirit, in prayer. He calms our hearts—or burdens or breaks our hearts—as needed.

This type of prayer starts in the heavens, passes through the discerning intercessor, and returns to the Throne. Such prayer is effective because God Himself initiates it. He loves to answer His own desires. We get the joy (and training) of being involved as His instruments!

## The Need for Discernment

We are entering days like none we have ever seen in our lifetime. Evil days.

Critical days. This calls for a new level of intercession. We need men and women who see ahead and pray fervently, faithfully, and effectively.

God is profoundly aware of these days. He has been navigating His Church, with all of our weaknesses, through the darkness of this world for decades. The gates of hell will never prevail against His agenda.

He can make each of us into intercessors who see ahead, like Francis Schaeffer did, and help heaven and earth move for God’s glory. **PC**

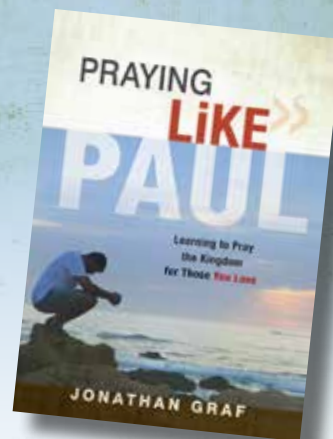


**BILL ELLIFF** is senior teaching pastor of The Summit Church, Little Rock, AR, and has authored several books, including his latest, *The Presence Centered Church* (available at [billelliff.org](http://billelliff.org)). He is also a member of the OneCry executive leadership team and co-author with Byron Paulus of *OneCry: A Nationwide Call for Spiritual Awakening* ([onecry.com](http://onecry.com)).

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# Bible Study

## Gaining Insight into God's Ways

**Note:** This Bible study is formatted for small group open discussion. If you use this study by yourself, we suggest you journal your answers to the discussion questions. Also, please use suggested translations where indicated. Biblegateway.com is an excellent source for translations you may not have on hand.

A number of years ago I began a spiritual quest to hear God's voice. I longed to hear Him speak to me personally. I wanted His specific guidance in things that mattered to Him and to me. I wanted to know His heart so I could intercede better. So I pleaded with God to teach me.

I read everything I could find about the ways God communicates. I talked to people who seemed to hear from Him more confidently than I did. And I ventured, ever so cautiously, into prophetic meetings and other venues unfamiliar and uncomfortable for me. I wanted to hear from God, so I was willing to be stretched.

During that season of intense spiritual seeking, I did learn to recognize God's voice. I will always be grateful for this gift that allows me to experience deeper intimacy with the Father than I'd ever known was possible. However, during this season I sometimes felt confused, hurt—even betrayed.

So, what went wrong? Why did something so important, so *good*, have a mixed outcome? I asked God about

it. His answer was clear: *You didn't use spiritual discernment.* He brought Paul's counsel to the Thessalonians to mind: "Don't put out the Spirit's fire. Don't despise what God has revealed. Instead, test everything. Hold on to what is good" (1 Thess. 5:19–21, gw).

I realized that I had done well when I opened my heart to the Holy Spirit and to God's people as they attempted to communicate what He was doing and saying. But I had failed when I did not test what I was hearing. I did not always use spiritual discernment.

The theme of this issue of *Prayer Connect* is so important. We need to be people who understand the times (see 1 Chron. 12:32). And we need to be tuned in to what the Spirit is saying to the Church and to us. But we need to do that with God-given discernment. This Bible study is intended to help you probe more deeply into what spiritual discernment is and how to mature in practicing it.

### Discussion Questions

In "Hearing God's Voice in a Deceptive World," J. Lee Grady mentions several "clear deception signs." Read the following verses and note any additional signs you find: Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 6:3–5; 2 Peter 2:1–3, 19; 1 John 2:22; 2 John 1:7–11; Jude 4, 8–10.

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Just as there are certain signs of false teaching and sketchy leadership, there are also signs of genuine, God-honoring ministry. Read the following Scriptures and note your insights: Matthew 7:15–16, 12:33; Galatians 5:22–23; 1 Timothy 3:1–3; James 3:16–18.

**By Cynthia Hyle Bezek**



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Jamie Overholser, in “The Practice of Discernment” asks, “What does God sound like?” A significant corresponding question is this: What does the enemy sound like? When you know the characteristics of both voices, discernment becomes much clearer. Look up the verses below then fill in the chart with your findings:

- Genesis 3:1
- Zechariah 3:1-4
- Mark 4:15
- John 3:17, 8:44, 10:10–11, 14:6
- Acts 20:32
- Romans 8:33
- 2 Corinthians 11:3
- Colossians 2:6–7
- 1 Thessalonians 3:13
- 2 Thessalonians 3:3
- Hebrews 6:18
- James 1:13
- 1 Peter 5:8
- Revelation 12:10

What God Sounds Like	What the Enemy Sounds Like

In her article “Seven Discernment Prayers for Leadership Decisions,” Kim Butts reminds us that the world’s wisdom is foolishness to God. Read the following passages. For each, note how God’s wisdom runs counter to the way humans would usually think. Joshua 6:1–5; Judges 7:1–8; 1 Samuel 16:1–13; 2 Kings 5:1–14; Luke 10:1–12; Acts 10:9–15.

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“Discernment is indispensable for prayer,” stresses Bill Elliff in his article “Discerning the Times.” Read the following familiar passages and state the reason for this truth in your own words: Matthew 18:19; John 14:13–14, 15:7; 1 John 5:14.

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### Action Steps

Discernment is a joint effort. On the one

hand, it is a gift from God. Paul reminds us that it’s appropriate to “eagerly desire” spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31, 14:1). On the other hand, as with other spiritual gifts, we need training and practice to effectively exercise discernment. The writer of Hebrews says that discernment is a trait of mature Christians “who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Heb. 5:14).

Take some time with God to tell Him about your desire and to listen for any action steps He gives you concerning how to grow in spiritual discernment. Write your thoughts, prayers, or next steps below. 

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**CYNTHIA HYLE BEZEK** is editorial director for Community Bible Study ([communitybiblestudy.org](http://communitybiblestudy.org)).

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INTERCESSORS FOR AMERICA

# TARGETED PRAYERS

**ONE OF THE MOST** profound roles an intercessor can play is to focus prayer on his or her local church. Many churches primarily cover the “fix-it” needs of their congregation (health, personal needs, etc.), but often neglect praying for spiritual fruit and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in their midst.

Whether you feel called or just nudged to pray for your church, here are some Scripture-based, Kingdom-focused prayers that can be a starting point for you in this important role:

**1. PASTORS:** Lord, I lift up our pastor/pastors to You. Thank You for their servant hearts. Keep our pastors from losing heart when ministry gets tough. Help them prove faithful with the things You have entrusted to them. Teach them Your ways so that they know You and find favor with You as they lead us. Keep them open and honest before You and help them to represent the truth plainly (2 Cor. 4:1; 1 Cor. 4:1–3; Ex. 33:13).

**2. ELDER:** Lord, I lift up our elders [church board] to You. Help us respect and honor them as they direct the affairs of our church. May they wholeheartedly give their attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Keep them above reproach, devoted to their families, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, and able to teach. May they be gentle and honest as they deal with people (1 Tim. 5:17; Acts 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:1–2; Titus 1:6–9).

**3. ADULTS:** Lord, I lift up the adults in our congregation to You. May we live worthy of Your call on our lives. As we respond to that call, fulfill every purpose and faith-filled act of service by Your power. May we be clothed in righteousness with hearts that sing for joy and delight greatly in You (Eph. 4:1; 2 Thess. 1:11; Ps. 132:9; Isa. 61:10).

**4. CHILDREN/YOUTH:** Lord, I lift up the children and youth in my congregation to You. May they remain humble examples of what we adults

need to become in the Kingdom. Let their conduct always be pure and right with reputations that show that they remember You, Creator God. Teach them to declare Your marvelous deeds. May they flee evil desires and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace (Matt. 18:3–4; Prov. 20:11; Eccl. 12:1; Ps. 71:17; 2 Tim. 2:22).

**5. LOST AMONG US:** Lord, I lift up the lost members of our congregation. Let the gospel be presented to them not only through the sermons but also with power and deep conviction of the Holy Spirit. Teach us to make the most of every opportunity to share Your salvation. Help us to be the fragrance of Christ to them. We stand against the enemy and his attempts to keep them blinded to Your truth (1 Thess. 1:5; Col. 4:5; 2 Cor. 2:15; 2 Cor. 4:4).

**6. WORSHIP LEADERS:** Lord, I lift up our worship leaders. Appoint people to these positions who understand the splendor of Your holiness and

# FOR YOUR CHURCH



# BY SANDRA HIGLEY

praise You with that understanding. Help them lead us faithfully in thanks for Your enduring love. Use their praise to defeat the enemy. May they be the true worshipers You are looking for—those who worship in spirit and in truth. Let them glory only in You, Jesus, so that they put no confidence in their own flesh (2 Chron. 20:21–22; John 4:23–24; Phil. 3:3).

**7. TEACHERS:** Lord, I lift up the teachers in our church. May everyone who holds that position—pastors, Sunday school teachers, small group leaders, youth leaders, guest speakers—rightly divide Your Word of truth. Let them admonish and teach with wisdom. Reveal the mysteries of Your Word to them and encourage them to speak those mysteries courageously and fearlessly. Let them speak with a spirit of faith that springs from their relationship with You (2 Tim. 2:15; Col. 1:28; Dan. 2:47; Phil. 1:14; 2 Cor. 4:13).

**8. BEHIND-THE-SCENES WORKERS:** Lord, I lift up the people who work behind the scenes at our church. Thank You for our nursery workers, parking lot attendants, office staff, building janitors, and others who have devoted themselves to the service of

## A Scripture-based Guide to Release God's Purposes



the saints. Bless them for the obedience and generosity they have displayed. May You receive praise as a result! Keep them in an attitude of humility that comes from wisdom and wholehearted service to You, rather than a desire to be noticed by others (1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 9:12–13; James 3:13; Eph. 6:7).

**9. PRAYER FOCUS:** Lord, I lift up the prayer focus in our church. Make us into a house of prayer. We desire to be clear-minded and self-controlled so that we can pray first—always, continually, and thankfully. May everyone recognize that this is Your desire for all and not just a few. Use us to stand in the gap for others. Let there be prayer ministry among us that is powerful and effective (Mark 11:17; 1 Peter 4:7; Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:17; Ezek. 22:30; James 5:16).

**10. SPIRITUAL LEVEL:** Lord, I

lift up the spiritual temperature of our church. Revive us! Refine us so that we burn hot for You. Give us singleness of heart and action so that we always fear You and follow Your precepts. Put within us the spirit of Josiah to turn to You with all our heart, soul, and strength. Open our minds to understand Your Word so that our hearts burn within us (Ps. 85:6; Rev. 3:14–18; Jer. 32:39; Ps. 111:10; 2 Kings 23:25; Luke 24:32, 45).

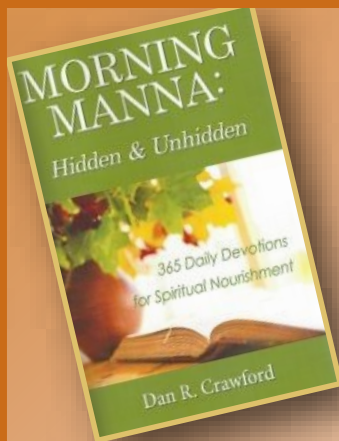
**11. SPIRIT-LED:** Lord, I lift up the issue of our willingness to be led by Your Spirit. Holy Spirit, show us any way we are grieving, quenching, or resisting You. Convict us and lead us. Help us keep in step with You as we live by You. Reign in us so that we experience Your freedom. Lead us into grace, life, and peace (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19; Acts 7:51; Ps. 143:10; Gal. 5:25; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:18; Rom. 8:6).

**12. SPIRITUAL GIFTS:** Lord, I lift up the use of spiritual gifts in our church. We eagerly desire spiritual gifts that You've given for our common good. Help us understand the various gifts and how they work. Teach us to use what we've received to serve others and faithfully administer Your grace—whatever form that takes. Help us exercise our gifts in love. Remind us to keep fanning into flame the gifts You've entrusted to us (1 Cor. 14:1, 12:4–7; 1 Peter 4:10; 2 Tim. 1:6).

**13. LOVE/UNITY:** Lord, I lift up our love for one another as a church. Help us purify ourselves by obeying the truth so that our love for each other will be sincere, deep, and from the heart. May our love for one another prove that we are Your disciples. Give us a spirit of unity so that we may glorify You with one heart and voice. Help us accept one another as we clothe ourselves in love (1 Peter 1:22; John 13:34–35; Rom. 15:5–7; Col. 3:14).

**14. FINANCES:** Lord, I lift up our church finances. May we sow generously into our church without reluctance or compulsion. May all grace abound so we have all we need for every good work You've assigned us. Make us rich in ways that result in generosity on our part so You will be praised. Keep reminding us of Your promise to throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out blessing on all who bring the whole tithe into Your house (2 Cor. 9:6–11; Mal. 3:10).

**15. THE HURTING:** Lord, I lift up those who are hurting right now. May they come to know You as *El Roi*, the God who sees them. For every situation of rejection, help them feel sonship with You. Bind up the brokenhearted! In every area of bondage, set the captives free; in every case of mourning, bring Your oil of gladness. Comfort the hurting so that they will have a ministry of comfort to others (Gen. 16:13; Rom. 8:15; Isa. 61:1–3; 2 Cor. 1:3–4).



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## 16. FREEDOM FROM BESETTING SINS:

Lord, I lift up all of us who struggle with sin issues. Keep us from the enemy's scheme of condemnation. Grant us repentance so that we can escape the trap of the evil one. Thank You that Jesus Christ did away with sin on the cross and that we are no longer slaves to it. Help us to throw off everything that entangles us and then run the race with perseverance (Rom. 8:1; 2 Tim. 2:25–26; Rom. 6:6; Heb. 12:1).

## 17. KINGDOM FOCUS/PRIORITIES:

Lord, I lift up our priorities as a congregation. Give us ears to hear what Your Spirit is saying to our church. Open our eyes to see things as You see them. Help us move beyond issues of immediate need to pursuing Kingdom issues. Bring us to a place where “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” are more than just words we say (Rev. 3:22; 2 Kings 6:17; Matt. 6:10, 25, 33).

## 18. GROWTH THROUGH EVANGELISM:

Lord, I lift up our church growth to You. Add to our number daily through new converts. Use us as Your agents to rescue people from darkness and bring them into Your Son's Kingdom. We long to be worthy ambassadors in this ministry You have entrusted to us—that of proclaiming Your message of reconciliation to a lost world (Acts 2:47; Col. 1:13; 2 Cor. 5:20).

**19. OUR COMMUNITY:** Lord, I lift up to You our community, especially the surrounding neighborhood. Let us love these people as we love ourselves. May our concern for their needs override other things that take our time and focus. Rebuild and restore areas that have been devastated. Send Your peace and prosperity into this place where You've planted us. Bless each individual home and family. Build each house from the inside out; watch over our city (Gal. 5:14; Prov. 3:28; Isa. 61:4;

Jer. 29:7; Luke 10:5–6; Ps. 127:1).

## 20. CONNECTIVITY WITH THE CHURCH IN OUR NATION AND WORLD:

Lord, I lift up the Church universal. Father, we claim the power of Your name over us so that we will be one, as You and Your Son are one. We want Your joy in full measure just as Your Son Jesus prayed for us. Help us live in the reality that we are not of this world; sanctify us by Your Word. May we be brought to complete unity so that the world will know the truth of the gospel. We seek Your face, O God! Thank You for hearing and forgiving us. We wait on You for the healing of our land (John 17:11–23; 2 Chron. 7:14).

## 21. PROTECTION FROM THE ENEMY:

Lord, I lift up our need for protection. Protect and deliver us from the evil one. Help us be as wise as ser-

pents and as innocent as doves as we deal with the wolves around us. Show us how to test every spirit to see if it is from You. Help us recognize the enemy's disguises and schemes so that he won't outwit us (John 17:15; Matt. 6:13; 1 John 4:1; 2 Cor. 2:11, 11:14).

These biblical prayers are directed toward specific intercession that appeals to God's heart for the fullness of His Kingdom to be released in your congregation. Invite other intercessors to join you in praying strategic prayers that will change the life of your church! **PC**



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This article is a shorter version of a prayer guide available at [prayerleader.com](http://prayerleader.com).



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## RAISING UP PRAYER WARRIORS IN PAINFUL PLACES





# Intercession in ALL SEASONS OF LIFE



The gospel echoes down every hall of the Children's Center Rehabilitation Hospital in Bethany, OK. The words of Jesus resound: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matt. 19:14).

Gretchen<sup>1</sup> is one of the children hospitalized at the Children's Center. She once played the violin and ran outside like any active little girl. Now, because of disease, she's trapped inside her body, unable to speak, but she remembers what her life was like before.

For eight years, Dorothy Bayles has served as chaplain to patients and staff at this facility where children like Gretchen receive care. According to Dorothy, 99 percent of the children do not verbalize. They communicate by looking to the right or left, or by blinking to signify yes or no. The staff uses pictures to communicate with the children.

Despite physical limitations, their connection with Jesus can go deep. During one encounter with Gretchen, Dorothy told her the story of Jesus.

Before Dorothy left Gretchen's bedside, she whispered, "God loves you and I love you."

Later, in a therapy class, Gretchen refused to work. The therapist realized Gretchen wanted to see the chaplain. Gretchen's question to Dorothy: *How do I know God?*

Many of the patients at the Children's Center deal with loss, leading to guilt and depression. These feelings are especially acute for those who remember their lives before injury or disease robbed them of the ability to move and communicate with the outside world.

So Dorothy told Gretchen, "You can put your guilt, disease, disappointment, and depression on Christ's body or you can carry them on yours." Gretchen chose to give her burdens to Jesus.

Gretchen's countenance displays evidence of her life-changing experience. When Dorothy tells visitors about Gretchen's relationship with Jesus, tears of joy flow down Gretchen's face. When asked how Jesus changed her life, Gretchen communicates: *I dream about Jesus a lot.*

**By Rebecca Shirey**

## INTERCESSION IN DIFFICULT SEASONS

Gretchen is also an intercessor. She represents many children at this hospital who have embraced prayer as a balm for their spirits and an opportunity to move beyond their limited boundaries to touch other people. These children provide special motivation for anyone experiencing illness, desperate circumstances, or prolonged periods of uncertainty.

When we ourselves experience a difficult season, we can ask God to increase our desire to intercede on behalf of other people. Intercession accomplishes something powerful in the life of the intercessor. It unites our heart with God's heart, enabling us to grow in compassion and love for others.

Intercession also provides opportunity to actively participate in God's Kingdom. Prayer moves beyond limitations of geography, time, and circumstances,

affording us the privilege of making eternal deposits for others.

The following suggestions can help those in challenging situations to navigate meaningful intercession:

- View this season as a calling from God. He may be presenting special opportunities to you.
- Recognize that intercession doesn't have to be long-winded or tiring. Intercession can even consist of thinking of people and asking that they experience God's presence.
- Set aside a specific time for intercession. We can pray anytime and anywhere, but designating a time to pray accelerates our commitment to pray.
- Pray with and for the people who come to visit. Your prayers together bring mutual encouragement.
- Remember that praying with others can be just a phone call away. If you can, connect with people by phone

and offer to pray for them. That simple act will minister to both of you!

- Consider writing a personal note to people for whom you pray. A written note allows the person to read your prayer, a Scripture verse, or a word of encouragement whenever they need strength.

My mother experienced considerable limitations during the last years of her life. From her corner of the sofa in her home, she continued to pray for her family and for others God brought into her life, including missionaries around the world. Although she was sometimes homebound, her prayers carried global reach and eternal significance.

## SHIFTING FOCUS FROM SELF TO OTHERS

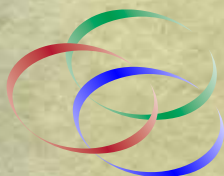
Dorothy describes the children she ministers to as furnaces of prayer. They operate

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in the priestly ministry of go-between, which is one of the definitions of intercession. They stand between heaven and a need on earth to petition for breakthrough. Intercession brings them pleasure and gives them a sense of purpose.

Dorothy leads the children to pray for themselves, their families, their friends, the facility, the chapel, and the world. These child-intercessors take their high calling seriously.

One young man, Patrick, has lived in the facility his entire life. He didn't think God loved him, but when Dorothy asked him to pray for the hospital administration, her invitation excited him. Praying for the staff helped shift his focus from himself to others—and ultimately to God's goodness and love.

Through the ministry of intercession, we invest in another person's life. Intercessory prayer draws us beyond the horizons of our trouble and pain. Our investment in other people enriches us and accelerates God's purposes on earth.

If you are a prayer leader in your church or organization, ask God to open your eyes to see intercessors in unexpected places. You might find them on prayer request lists. They might be homebound or in nursing homes. They might be people who have withdrawn from life because of tragedy or loss.

You can mentor them in prayer, strategically developing a ministry that not only encourages those with challenging illness and pain but also helps them recognize their value to the Body of Christ. Much like the children in the rehabilitation facility, a specific prayer assignment can turn a time of isolation and loneliness into a season of fruitful intercession. My friend Beulah—now in her 80s—is a role model in prayer. She has always been an intercessor. But after her husband died suddenly, she made a life-changing decision to move from her home in South Carolina to a small town in Georgia, near the campus of a small college.

She answered God's call to pray for the school and for every student and

faculty member. She prays for each one by name every day. Instead of allowing a season of loss to define her, she made the choice to increase her investment in others through prayer.

## EMBRACING THE SECRET PLACE

Jesus said, "When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matt. 6:6, NKJV, emphasis mine).

The children at the rehabilitation hospital may understand this truth better than we do. They live in the secret place of the shut door. Physical limitations severely limit their outward interaction, but their inner lives are rich in prayer. They are trapped in their bodies, but the Father "who is in the secret place" dwells there with them.

Before I learned about the child-intercessors at the rehabilitation center, I

overlooked the promise in the middle of this verse. I recognized my responsibility to enter the secret place and shut the door, but I missed the assurance Jesus gives us: "Your Father . . . *is* in the secret *place*" (emphasis mine).

No matter how desperate our circumstances, we can rest in the promise of the secret place. When we shut the door, we don't have to wonder if we will experience God's presence. He is already there.

This is good news for everyone but especially for those isolated because of illness. They can seize this time of decreased activity and fewer distractions as a time to grow closer to God. Intimacy with Him is a special gift available to all who seek Him. And enjoying His presence replaces loneliness with the privilege of partnering with Him in prayer.

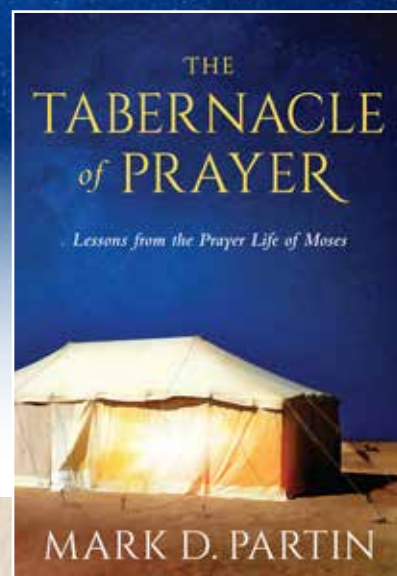
His presence also gives us the assurance that we do not pray alone. When we ask God to strengthen, heal, bless,

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and transform, then His Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Jesus—prays through us. He guides our prayers.

The apostle Paul writes of this strength in weakness in his letter to the Romans:

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God (8:26–27).

## IDENTIFYING WITH PAIN

Most of the children at the Children's Center live with debilitating pain. Dorothy leaned over the bed of Meagan, a young girl who was obviously suffering. Praying for God to soothe Meagan's pain and give her peace, Dorothy heard the

child repeating the same words over and over: "Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me." Meagan's words spoke declaration, comfort, and hope over her pain.

The physical and emotional pain the children experience heightens their sensitivity to pain in others. Little Dorita cried quietly for several days. Then another girl, Michelle, prayed for her and Dorita got better. In childlike innocence Michelle said to Dorothy, "I helped Dorita today. Aren't you going to say thank You to Jesus?"

If you are experiencing painful illness or injury, consider devoting a portion of your day to praying for those who are also suffering. Your place of personal difficulty allows you to intercede from a position of deep understanding and sensitivity. Pray with faith, knowing God is all-powerful and loves you—and the people you are praying for. Pray with joy and thanksgiving that

God hears your prayers.

Intercessory prayer reflects God's character of love and mercy. As we release mercy and love to others through prayer, mercy and love multiplies within us. Intercession helps us reach beyond ourselves and grow in compassion for others.

Dorothy impacts the children's lives, but they also touch hers. She says, "God invites us to a broader life. If I hurt, I pray that God will use it for His glory. Whatever pain I experience, I pray for God to help me focus my attention on prayer for others."


Paul wrote, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (Rom. 12:12). These children model this verse, and inspire anyone afflicted with physical pain or painful circumstances.

## MOVING BEYOND LIMITATIONS

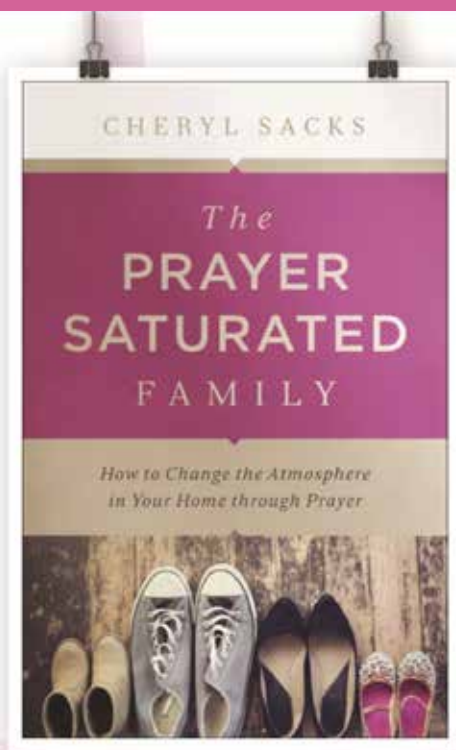
Douglas, a young man living at the Children's Center several years ago, was completely paralyzed but verbal. A visiting chaplain making his rounds through the halls of the Children's Center asked Douglas about his spiritual life.

"Do you want to know my favorite Bible verse?" Douglas replied. He then quoted: "I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13).

These children are role models of courage. Their zeal for Jesus challenges us. Their ardor for prayer convicts us. In their limitations, they teach us to look beyond the borders of our circumstances and embrace unlimited opportunities in Christ.

They model a truth that whatever season of life we are in, God's Spirit always empowers us to partner with Him to be transforming agents of intercession. Truly, "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." 

<sup>1</sup>Some names have been changed in this article.



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**REBECCA SHIREY** is an author and speaker with a passion for encouraging women ([rebeccashirey.com](http://rebeccashirey.com)). She and her husband Lou are prayer leaders with the International Pentecostal Holiness Church.



## The Power of Family Prayer | By Cheryl Sacks

A number of years ago I had a powerful vision of our nation shrouded in darkness. Suddenly, a single home started to glow with living light, which then spread to others, rapidly transforming the entire country!

Then I heard the voice of the Lord say, *Revival will come to America when the family altar is restored.*

I believe with all my heart that we are now in the awakening moment I saw in my vision: God is about to visit the families of America.

When God spoke those words to me, I was standing on the platform in my home church, having just finished speaking in a conference on “Revival and the Holy Spirit.” Not one of the speakers had mentioned family prayer. And I wasn’t sure if something as simple as families praying together could transform a nation. So I asked the Lord to confirm if He was really speaking to me.

At that moment, a young man walked to the microphone and began to pray, echoing the words I had just heard: “Lord, restore the family altar in homes across America.”

### Timeless Principles

This encounter with the Lord took me on a journey to learn more about the power of family prayer. One day I ran across a book titled *How to Have a Family Altar*. Even though the book was written in the early 1950s, its principles are timeless. One story confirmed further what God had been speaking to me:

The 17<sup>th</sup> century Scottish church leader, Thomas Boston, was burdened over the cold spiritual state of his church. It was not only cold, but practically empty. He decided that the way to

bring revival to his church and community was to establish family prayer in every home. He went from home to home, leading people to Christ and encouraging families to pray daily together. After nearly three years, revival fires were burning in his church, and large numbers of joy-filled believers and seekers of God crowded into the church every Sunday!<sup>1</sup>

In today’s world of busy schedules and digital distractions, it’s hard for families to find time to eat dinner together, let alone pray together. Yet praying together deepens relationships, alleviates arguing and fighting, and strengthens family ties more than any single thing we can do.

### Launching Family Prayer

Many believe that creating a new, lasting habit takes at least a month. That’s why I encourage church leaders to launch a month-long campaign to help families jumpstart a lifetime of praying together.

Here are some ideas from my own experience, along with great advice from pastors and prayer leaders:

- Frank Nevarez, pastor of Emmanuel Fellowship, Cottonwood, AZ, says, “Launch your family prayer campaign and give it a unique name and theme.” He dedicated an entire month to teaching on family prayer and encouraging families to pray together daily.
- Select a resource for your church family to read together, such as Kim Butts’s book, *The Praying Family*, or my new book, *The Prayer-Saturated Family: How to Change the Atmosphere in Your Home Through Prayer*. These are full of ideas to engage the whole family in prayer.

- Kevin Hartke, pastor of Trinity Christian Fellowship, Chandler, AZ, successfully engaged Sunday school classes in a family prayer campaign. Everyone read through a book on family prayer and then discussed how they could put its principles into action in their own homes.
- During a family prayer campaign, give your families an assignment, such as praying through the 31-Day Family Prayer Guide found in *The Prayer-Saturated Family*. This book has creative ideas and scriptural prayer models to jumpstart or strengthen family prayer.
- Initiate a citywide campaign. Prayer leader Jason Hubbard in Bellingham, WA, bought books on family prayer for the 60 pastors and church prayer coordinators in his network and launched a month of family prayer across their entire city.
- Seek support on the state level. In Phoenix, in response to our request, Arizona Governor Doug Ducey issued a proclamation designating January National Family Prayer Month.

Giving time and effort to your church families’ growth in the Lord and the spiritual climate of their homes is one of the best investments you can make! Healthy families create healthy churches, healthy schools, and healthy communities. **PC**

<sup>1</sup>Norman V. Williams, *How to Have a Family Prayer Altar* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1951), 9.



**CHERYL SACKS** is a national speaker and the co-founder and leader of BridgeBuilders International Leadership Network ([bridgebuilders.net](http://bridgebuilders.net)). She is the author of three books that are available at [prayershop.org](http://prayershop.org).

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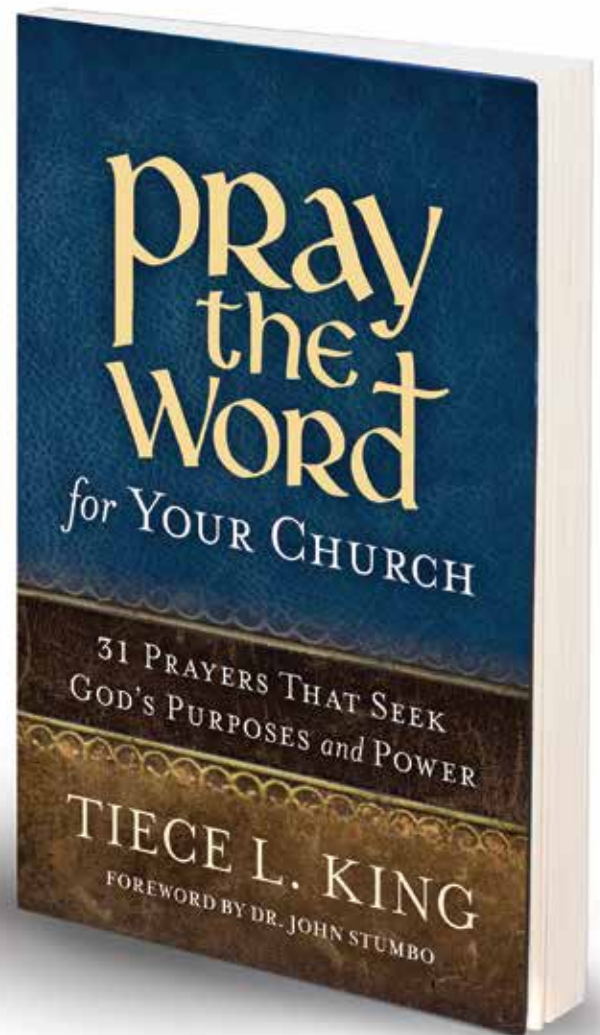
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## Concentrated Prayer for Wandering Minds

Brother Longprayers stands to pray near me in a prayer meeting. “Gracious heavenly Father,” he begins. “We thank You that You are sovereign over all. And Your Word invites us to ‘approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace.’” [Heb. 4:16].

Yes, Lord, my heart agrees. *That man sure is articulate in his prayers.* My mind takes a detour. *And he must have memorized a lot of Scripture to use it so much when he prays.*

“You are the Great Physician, and we ask you to heal Sister Surgerybound and provide for her financially,” he continues.

*I wonder if I paid my American Express bill yet. It’s due tomorrow.*

Brother Longprayers’ voice rises, and my brain reengages. “Father, You are omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. You know what she’s going through, nothing is too difficult for You, and we know You are with her right now.”

*Hmm. My new friend Diana didn’t show up tonight. I wonder if she’s OK. She said she was coming.*

A few minutes later, Sister Notsoeloquent begins, “God, bless all them missionaries around the world that our church supports.”

I cringe at her bad grammar, and my Bible falls off my lap. I reach down to pick it up and notice I’m wearing one navy shoe and one black shoe. *How did I*

*put on mismatched shoes? What are people going to think?*

And on it goes. I start thinking, *It’s my turn to pray next. I wonder how I can express that prayer request just right.*

### Focusing Our Minds

The above scenario may be an exaggeration. But perhaps not by much. I don’t know anyone who doesn’t get distracted during corporate prayer. Our minds wander. And the detours often take us places we don’t want to go.

My heart resonates with David when he prays, “Hear my cry, O God; Attend to my prayer” (Ps. 61:1, NKJV). Not just “listen to,” as the NIV renders it. But “pay attention to.”

And in the same way that I want God to “attend to” me, I also want to “attend to” the prayer requests others have voiced. I want so much to engage and attend (be in attendance, be all there, pay attention) to what others are praying—petitions and praises.

So how do we “attend to” others’ prayers? I’ve found a simple little mind trick to help me stay focused during corporate prayer—in small groups or large, in a worship service, or even during the before-dinner prayers of Grandpa Godly, who prays so long the food gets cold.

We can simply imagine the person leading in prayer saying, “Repeat after me. . . .”

So when the local Brother Longprayers begins with “Gracious heavenly Father,” we can repeat, and pray within our heart, that phrase, *Gracious heavenly Father.* When he begins quoting Scripture, we can repeat it after him, phrase by phrase: *approach God’s throne of grace . . . with confidence . . . so that we may receive mercy . . . and find grace.* And when he prays for healing and provision, we can repeat in our minds, *We ask you to heal Sister Surgerybound . . . and provide for her financially.*

Then when Sister Notsoeloquent uses bad grammar, we can paraphrase, the way *we* would say it. When she prays more generally for all the missionaries, we can pray for one we know personally or one whose ministry particularly touches our heart: *Father, I pray that You will open the heart of the resistant college student Brother Tenderheart wrote to us about.*

When our mind wanders in a *good* direction—such as praying in specifics for a generalized prayer—we can catch up, when we’re ready, with whoever is leading in prayer.

I want my heart to beat in sync with the people I’m joining in prayer. So when I find my mind wandering and I want to “be in attendance” and “be all there,” I follow this simple approach: Repeat after me.

**JOYCE K. ELLIS** is a freelance writer and editor from Eden Prairie, MN.

## Do Not Be Alarmed

I shouldn’t look at email and social media first thing in the morning. I know this. But I still do it sometimes. Actually, I still do it a lot.

Like a couple of weeks ago. In less than ten minutes, I had a disturbing

briefing of conspiracy-theory politics, tainted food warnings, heresy allegations, and gloomy presidential forecasts. One email even promised, “This will alarm



you!”—and sure enough, it did! My thoughts, my emotions, even my body felt agitated.

I left my computer, got my coffee, and went to spent time



with God. As I poured out my fears and anxieties—and embarrassment for letting these things trouble me like they did—He gently reminded me that He is still working all things, including those I’d been assaulted with that morning, together for His good purposes.

How panic-ridden our culture is—even our Christian culture! How myriad are the ways the enemy tries to paralyze us with fear. Even Christian media too often succumbs to rumor-spreading, sensationalism, and fearmongering.

But fear does not strengthen my faith—it kills it. It makes me feel weak, powerless, even hopeless at times. The solution can’t be denial, though. So I asked the Lord to give me a strategy to combat the enemy’s attempts to undo me with fear.

A few days later, I did some personal Bible study. As I meandered through Old and New Testaments, I was surprised by

all the “do not” commands I found:

- Do not fear the people of the land (Num. 14:9).
- Do not fear or panic, or dread your enemies (Deut. 20:3).
- Do not be discouraged (Josh. 1:9).
- Do not fear or dread the conspiracies everyone else is talking about (Isa. 8:12).
- Do not be dismayed (Isa. 41:10).
- Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals (Isa. 51:7).
- Do not fear disgrace (Isa. 54:4).
- Do not fear a wicked king (Jer. 42:11).
- Do not be afraid when rumors are heard in the land (Jer. 51:46).
- Do not be afraid of rebellious, obstinate, or stubborn people—or their words (Ezek. 2:3–6).
- Do not lose heart (2 Cor. 4:16).
- Do not fear unjust threats (1 Peter 3:14).

And why not fear? Because of who God is and what He does. Just look at a tiny sampling of this truth:

- He strengthens those whose hearts are fully committed to Him (2 Chron. 16:9).

- He makes us bold and stouthearted (Ps. 138:3, NIV 1984).
- He is our strength and salvation (Isa. 12:2).
- He strengthens and helps us (Isa. 41:10).
- He goes before, with, and after us (Isa. 52:12).
- He renews us day by day (2 Cor. 4:16).
- He gives us a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7, KJV).

Reading God’s reassuring words encouraged me. But I knew that I would need that encouragement on a regular basis. So I wrote down some of the “do not” reminders on a note card. And then underneath them, I wrote God’s promises. This card sits on my desk, by my laptop where I get most of my news.

I can’t stick my head in the sand and ignore what is happening around me. But I can defend myself against alarm, panic, discouragement, and dismay. And what can do that better than the never-changing Word of God?

**CYNTHIA HYLE BEZEK** is editorial director for *Community Bible Study* and former editor of *Pray!* magazine.



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- Pray for Carol Madison, editor, as she leads the prayer initiative for PULSE Twin Cities. The goal is to fill the U.S. Bank Stadium (home of Minnesota Vikings) with the Church of the Twin Cities for prayer and outreach to the lost. Carol is recruiting thousands of intercessors to pray in advance.
- Pray for Jon Graf, publisher, as he travels extensively to teach on prayer in churches around the nation and also works with authors for PrayerShop Publishing. Ask God to connect Jon with strong writers on the topic of prayer.
- Pray for the financial needs of *Prayer Connect*, including increased circulation and full advertising in each issue.



## True Revivals and the Way God Works | By Horatius Bonar

**T**he world is still sleeping its sleep of death. It has been a slumber of many generations; sometimes deeper, sometimes lighter—yet still a slumber like that of the tomb, as if destined to continue till the last trumpet sound, and then there shall be no more sleep!

Yet God has not left it to sleep on unwarned. He has spoken in a voice that might reach the dumbest ears and quicken the coldest heart.

The multitude has always slept, but there has always been a little flock awake. Even in the world's deepest midnight there have been always children of the light and of the day. In the midst of a slumbering world some have been in every age awake. God's voice had reached them, and His mighty power had raised them, and they walked the earth, awake among sleepers, the living among the dead.

The history of the Church is full of these awakenings, some on a larger and some on a smaller scale. Many a wondrous scene has been witnessed from the day of Pentecost downwards to our own day, and what better deserves the attention and the study of the believer than the record of these outpourings of the Spirit?

### The Way God Works

As an illustration of how remarkably the work was of God and not of man, we quote the following passages from *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions* by Jonathan Edwards [related to the Revival in Northampton, Massachusetts, beginning in 1737].

"It is observable how, at this remarkable day, a spirit of deep concern would seize upon persons. Some were in the

house and some walking in the highway; some in the woods and some in the field; some children and some adults and some elderly persons. They would sometimes of a sudden be brought under the strongest impressions, from a sense of the great realities of the other world and eternal things.

"But such things were usually, if not always, impressed upon men while they were in some way exercising their minds upon the Word of God or spiritual objects. For the most part, it has been under the public preaching of the Word that these lasting impressions have been fastened upon them.

"A great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world, became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees and all ages. All other talk but about spiritual and eternal things, was soon thrown off.

"The involvement of their hearts in this great concern could not be hid. It appeared in their very countenances. It was then a dreadful thing amongst us to be out of Christ, in danger every day of dropping into hell. What peoples' minds were intent upon was to escape for their lives and fly from the wrath to come!

"All would eagerly lay hold of opportunities for their souls, and would very often meet together in private houses for religious purposes. There was scarcely a single person in the town, old or young, left unconcerned about the great things of eternity.

"The work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner, and increased more and more. Souls come by flocks to Jesus Christ. From day to day, for many months together, might be seen evident instances of sinners brought out

of darkness into marvelous light.


"Those among us that had formerly been converted were greatly enlivened and renewed with fresh and extraordinary incomings of the Spirit of God. Many who had before labored under difficulties about their own spiritual condition, had now their doubts removed by a more satisfying experience and more clear discoveries of God's love."

### Amazing Heaven and Earth

When God would do a marvelous work, such as may amaze all heaven and earth, He commands silence all around, sends for the still, small voice and then sets some feeble instrument to work and straightway it is done! The Creator, in the silent majesty of power, noiseless yet resistless, achieves by a word the infinite wonders of omnipotence!

In order to loose the bands of winter and bring in the fresh greenness of the pleasant spring, God does not send forth His angels to hew in pieces the thickened ice, or to strip off from the mountain's side the gathered snows or to plant anew over the face of the bleak earth, flowers fresh from His creating hand.

No! He breathes from His lips a mild warmth into the frozen air, and forthwith, in stillness but in irresistible power, the work proceeds. Such is God's method of working, both in the natural and in the spiritual world—silent, simple, majestic, and resistless!

Is the Lord's hand shortened that it cannot save, or is His ear heavy that it cannot hear? 

**HORATIUS BONAR** (1808–1889) was a minister who served the Church of Scotland. He was also a popular author, hymn writer, and editor of *The Quarterly Journal of Prophecy*.





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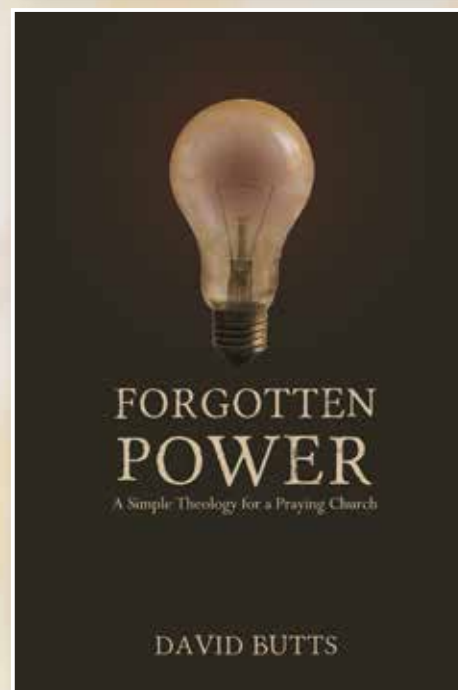
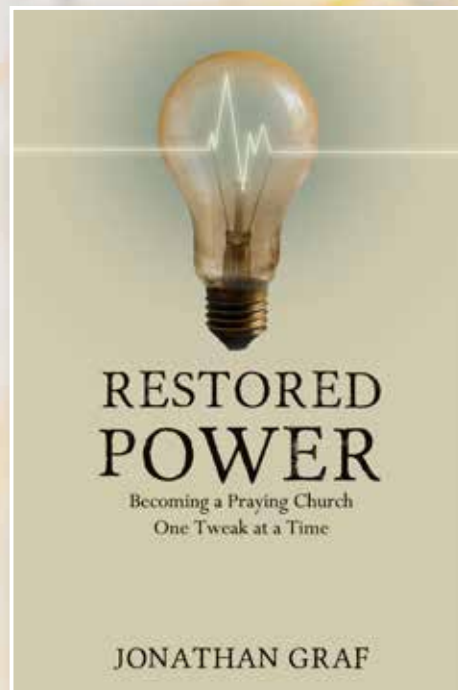
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