

ISSUE THIRTY-SEVEN | APRIL-JUNE 2019

PRAY

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LOVE ONE ANOTHER

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PRAY

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Business and Shipping Address

PRAY

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812.238.5504 | praymagazine.org

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We are looking for general articles, ideas, and news stories on what God is doing as a result of prayer. We are primarily looking for newly written pieces that have not appeared in other publications. Writer's guidelines are available by emailing Carol Madison at editor@prayerconnect.net. For news stories, we recommend emailing first to see if we have an interest in reporting on the event or item you wish to write about. Send your submissions to:

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4300 West 98th St. | Bloomington, MN 55437
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Subscriptions

PRAY is published four times per year, available in Print (\$24.99 per year) or Digital (\$19.99 per year) formats, and through the Church Prayer Leaders Network (CPLN) Membership (\$35.99 per year). Both CPLN and Print subscriptions include access to the Digital version. To subscribe, go to praymagazine.org. We also have multiple copy discounts available for individuals or churches who want to purchase copies for a prayer team or small groups:

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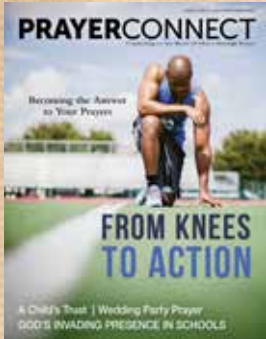
Need a Speaker for Your Prayer Conference or Event?

There are a number of gifted speakers associated with PRAY. Jonathan Graf regularly ministers in churches of varying sizes. Carol Madison is also available to minister in the area of prayer for revival and community transformation, and mentoring the next generation in prayer. The Church Prayer Leaders Network also has many speakers associated with its ministries. You can find contact information at the respective emails or websites.

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Start with a Complete Set

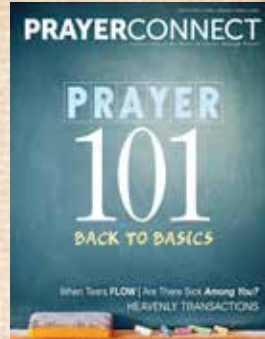
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Hope for a World in Turmoil



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COVER PRICE: \$6.00 | PRAYERSHOP PRICE: \$5.00

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Published by

National Day of Prayer Task Force

Sponsored by

America's National Prayer Committee
Denominational Prayer Leaders Network

The mission of **PRAY** is

1. To encourage and equip believers toward a deeper walk with Jesus Christ through prayer—our experiential connection to God.
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 PRAY

Our January - March 2019 issue of *PRAY* magazine (previously named *Prayer Connect*) has the theme of "Extraordinary Living through Prayer." It focuses on ways to get our lives in order: spiritually, financially, and relationally. Extraordinary means praying beyond the ways you normally intercede. You can order this issue or back issues of *Prayer Connect* at prayershop.org.



PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Prayer Leads to Love

My six-year-old grandson Jack cracks me up! Recently my daughter (his mom) doodled some plans in pencil for a house they are thinking of building. When she finished, she set the plans and the pencil on the coffee table and walked away to do something else. When she came back later, she was amused to find that Jack had erased the name of his sister on her room, and had substituted the name of his "girlfriend" Natalie. When asked why, he quipped, "I love Natalie and want to play with her all the time."



Apparently, he only had so much capacity to love, and since there weren't enough rooms, his sister had to go.

In a way, I am like that. I think a lot of us are. I love my family, several friends, and, in some capacity, I certainly love my fellow believers because the Bible says I am supposed to. But I am not sure how much capacity I have to love beyond that.

Lesson Learned

Several years ago, I learned about the power of prayer and its connection to love. My wife and I had just moved into a home we had built—the second house completed in a new neighborhood. When we moved in, the 15 homes under construction indicated we soon would have neighbors.

We had just learned about the Prayer-Care-Share formula of first praying for neighbors, then looking for ways to show the love of Christ to them, and finally getting the opportunity to share Jesus with them. I decided to try it with new neighbors. My wife and I would greet new neighbors when they moved in and learn their names. I started praying for them.

What I found was that as I prayed by name for them, a natural desire to get to know them started to form within me! God was giving me His heart for them and a capacity to love them.

I suspect that is why Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). He knows that if we start praying, He will fill us with this love!

Our National Day of Prayer theme this year is "Love One Another." A very timely theme! Our nation seems filled with hatred fueled by social media, the news media, and politics. Sadly, many believers are also caught up in it. Yet we are instructed—commanded—to love.

How do we love? By praying for people with whom we disagree (including those who post things on Facebook that drive us up a wall). And by praying for ourselves and our fellow believers, that we would put on love.

When we pray, Jesus will make more room in our hearts and fill us with His love.

—Jonathan Graf

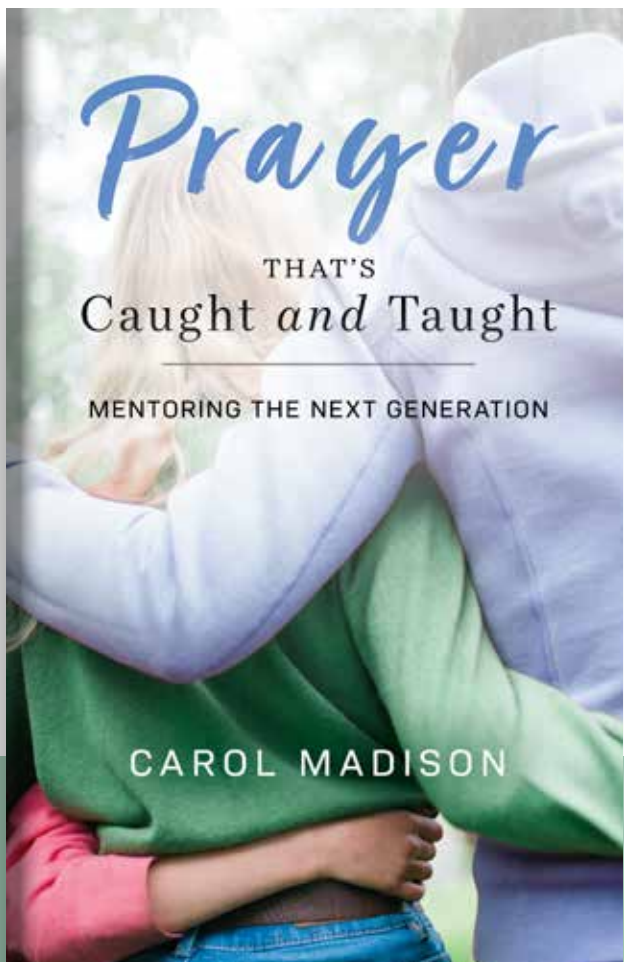
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Prayer That's Caught and Taught by Carol Madison, the editor of *PRAY*, provides Scriptures and information on 9 key aspects of prayer that need to be taught. She offers a format to easily teach each aspect, but also allows you to insert your own prayer experience stories into the informal lessons. Those you are mentoring both learn about prayer principles and how to practice prayer.



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Spiritual Awakening at Arizona State University

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

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

Last year, a dozen ministries united behind a 40-day prayer focus, during which petitions were lifted day and night from within a tent erected near the main campus square. The initiative was so fruitful, the ministries decided to continue the effort over the balance of



the academic semester. In fall 2018, the tally of participating ministries and campus churches reached 17. A fresh 56-day campaign drew prodigals, atheists, Muslims, New Agers, and students suffering from depression. In addition to witnessing numerous conversions, healings, and deliverances, the intercessors also watched God begin to move among the university faculty and administration.

One of the more significant breakthroughs involved the school's Interfaith Council of Religious Advisors. For years, the woman directing the council was motivated to establish ASU as a model of the global interfaith movement. As time went by, her attitude toward Christians hardened, and ministries found their access to campus facilities severely limited.

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

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

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

GEORGE OTIS, The Sentinel Group (sentinelgroup.org), adapted from a Nov. 15, 2018, email.

Bipartisan Senate Group Meets Weekly for Prayer

In this deeply partisan political climate, it may come as a surprise that a group of Senate Democrats and Republicans come together each week to pray.

"It is literally the most liberal Democrats and the most conservative Republicans," Sen. Chris Coons (D-DE) tells CBN News. "It's not just the centrist group."

Coons, who co-chairs the group with Republican Sen. James Lankford, describes it as the best hour of his week. "We do two things we don't otherwise do; we listen to each other and we trust each other," Coons says.

This Senate Prayer Breakfast is a tradition dating back to 1943, and about one-quarter of senators participate in the weekly Wednesday morning event led

by Senate Chaplain Barry Black. Each week, a different senator is picked to share a message with the group.

"What you're sharing is exactly what an opposition research guy would want to know in your next campaign—your weakness," explains Coons. "How have you fallen short? What's been difficult about your childhood, your marriage, or your public service? These aren't just sort

of easy two-dimensional—these are folks really sharing of themselves to each other and that’s what makes it special.”

The group closes each meeting holding hands in prayer. Coons says friendships made in the prayer group have helped improve his working relationships.

“Look, it’s really tough to throw a punch, at least verbally, on the floor of the Senate or in an interview when that morning you were holding hands

in prayer. And that’s powerful. That’s important,” says Coons. “It gives you a real insight into someone’s walk with the Lord to hear them pray on a weekly basis. It just lays a basis for a very different sort of relationship.”

A strong motivation for Coons to preserve relationships is his awareness that the world is watching. “In dozens of countries around the world they look at the Senate, they look at the Congress,

they look at the United States and they say democracy doesn’t work. That’s bad,” says Coons. “So I remind my colleagues, ‘Look, folks, it’s not just our kids who are watching. It’s our kids, it’s the rest of the world, and it’s history. And we have to show that this is the best way to resolve conflict peaceably and that we can really solve those problems that the average American wants us to tackle.’”

Taken from CBN News (cbn.com).

Myanmar Christians Not Allowed to Pray in Church

Pastors in Myanmar report that hundreds of minority Christians there are being forced to sign papers, vowing to limit their faith and not pray in churches.

A church leader identified as Rev. Lazarus, general secretary of the Lahu Baptist Convention in Kyaing Tong, eastern Shan State, told UCA News that close to 100 Wa Christians were released

by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) after they agreed to the orders. Christians who signed the pledges are now mandated to only pray privately in their homes, not in churches. Believers are faced with no choice but to sign the papers.

The UWSA, which grew out of the Communist Party of Burma, accuses Christians of causing instability in the area, *Myanmar Times* reports. It has been



targeting churches built after 1992, arguing they were built without permission.

Adapted from *The Christian Post* (christianpost.com).

Incurable Tumor Disappears after Community Prays

Nearly six months after an 11-year-old Texas girl was diagnosed with an incurable brain tumor called diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma, or DIPG, doctors can no longer find a trace of it after her family and friends prayed for a miracle. Dr. Virginia Harrod, with Dell Children’s Medical Center, told KVUE television news in Austin, TX, that DIPG is a rare disease.

“It is very rare, but when we see it, it is a devastating disease. You have decreased ability to swallow, sometimes vision loss, decreased ability to talk, eventually difficulty with breathing,” Harrod said.

The doctor explained that the girl had gone through weeks of radiation treatment but there was no expectation that



the tumor would just disappear. “Roxli’s recovery,” Harrod said, is “unbelievable.”

Organizers of a support group on Facebook, called “Roxli’s Rox Star Benefit,” say that she loves Jesus “to her core” and their community was heartbroken to learn of her diagnosis. The people of Buda, TX, where the family lives, prayed with her parents for a miracle.

“Her diagnosis has broken the hearts of our entire community,” the group says. “We have been taken to our knees and called to battle by storming the gates of heaven with our faith-filled prayers. We know the one thing the doctors didn’t factor in was our God, and He is in the business of miracles!”

Adapted from *The Christian Post* (christianpost.com).



Prayer Calendar

Global 4/14 Day of Prayer for Children and Trafficking
Sunday, April 14
global414day.com

National Day of Prayer
Thursday, May 2
nationaldayofprayer.org

30 Days of Prayer for Muslim World
May 6–June 4
30daysprayer.com

Weekend of Prayer for Children at Risk
June 1–2
viva.org/pray

Love

One Another

I've noticed a pattern in the exercise facility at my apartment complex. Everyone wears earbuds for music, and they're all completely focused on their own routines. There's no conversation, and they hardly acknowledge each other.

But if I make it a point to smile and say hello when I walk in, everyone returns the smile and engages with me at least a little. A friendly smile is contagious.

And so is love. People respond to genuine acts of love and compassion.

One man who frequents the exercise room is a bit annoying. He tends to spread out and take over the room, placing personal items on various equipment that he's not using. For a long time, he irked me.

But then I realized I was the one who needed a change of heart. I begrudgingly started to pray for him and asked God to give me a Christlike love for him.

I finally asked his name. Suddenly, Mike and I are exercise buddies. I know that he doesn't care to have the television on or the fan blowing on him. In return, he knows I like to finish the HGTV show that I'm watching, and then I'll turn the TV off for his sake. We greet each other and ask about our weekends. And he

doesn't spread his towels and warm-up clothing out across the room anymore.

A simple prayer for a change of heart, an intentional effort, and a demonstration of compassion on my part changed everything.

Power of Love

Imagine the impact of the Church if we, right now, would determine to fully live out the answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17:25–26: "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known *in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them*" (italics added).

Jesus says that He operates by the overwhelming love of His Father. And He can, in turn, fully manifest that love in us because Christ Jesus Himself is in us. What an astounding, powerful promise!

This issue of *PRAY* is based on the 2019 theme of the National Day of Prayer: "Love One Another." In his lead article, Dr. Ronnie Floyd fleshes out the hope of transforming America by obeying Jesus' command to love. Dr. J. Kie Bowman links the words *love* and *prayer* together and makes the case that more prayer leads to greater love. And Matt Lockett and Will Ford tell the remarkable story of reconciliation between their families based on forgiveness for a generations-past atrocity. Kim Butts wraps up our theme with biblical ways to pray toward greater love.

I believe Jesus continues to intercede right now for us, His beloved, to bring about a revival of love. If a smile can change the self-focused atmosphere of an exercise room, imagine how our contagious love can touch a divided nation that desperately needs Jesus.

CAROL MADISON is editor of *PRAY* and the author of *Prayer That's Caught and Taught*, available through prayershop.org.

The National Day of Prayer Mobilizes Unified Public Prayer for America.

LOVE



BY DR. RONNIE FLOYD

ONE ANOTHER

Transforming a Nation

The United States of America is comprised of more than 328 million people, each of whom lives in one of 19,510 incorporated locations in the United States (towns, cities, and villages) in 3,142 counties.

Our vast nation needs the transforming message of Christ.

Advancing an intentional strategy of prayer for America calls upon each Christian, church, and ministry to do all we can, working together to achieve this God-sized assignment: to remember our audience and the daunting task entrusted to us.

Not one of us can advance this strategy alone. We need one another.

Transforming America with Prayer

Transforming America is only possible when the Lord hears the roar of His people in prayer for all of America.

That is why the National Day of Prayer is significant. It calls upon each of us to unite with our fellow believers in prayer for our nation on

one specific day: Thursday, May 2, 2019. The National Day of Prayer is the one day each year when every town, city, and county should have at least one prayer observance for America. This needs to be accomplished in 2019.

Prayer can help create a culture where a transforming message can be heard and received by everyone, including people who may not look like us, believe like us, talk like us, or understand us.

If we cover our nation in prayer, America will receive this transforming message that will be lifted up across our nation, beginning now and especially on the National Day of Prayer.

Transforming America with Jesus' Words: Love One Another

"Love One Another" is the theme for the 2019 National Day of Prayer. These words are powerful and convicting. They set a spiritual standard for us and challenge us.

Jesus' words, "Love one another," are recorded in John 13:34: "I give you a new

command: *Love* one another. Just as I have *loved* you, you are also to *love* one another” (CSB, emphasis added). Please notice, in this one verse, Jesus calls us three times to love.

Love is so important to Jesus that He went further with these convicting words in the next verse: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love another.” Of all the actions we can take as Christ followers, only one action distinguishes us from everyone else in this world. It is *Love One Another*.

In our nation, where government cannot fix us and politics cannot heal us, we must call out to God and live out before others these transforming words: *Love One Another!*

Why Love One Another?

Love One Another is a dynamic theme to advance, beginning now and through

the National Day of Prayer and beyond. These are the words of Jesus Christ. We cannot improve on what Jesus said: “Love one another. Just as I have loved you. . .” (John 13:34).

I find it very powerful that in the first part of John 13, Jesus said someone would betray Him, and at the last part of that same chapter, He declared someone would deny Him three times. But it was in the middle of this chapter that Jesus proclaimed boldly but compassionately, “Love one another.”

This theme is extremely relevant. It is clear, simple, and easy to understand. It is also easy to communicate, even to people who are perhaps very different from us and do not understand us.

I believe everyone in the United States would agree that our nation could become much better if we would just love one another. Everyone gets it. America needs to learn to love one another.

How Deep Is Jesus' Love?

John 13 begins Jesus' farewell to His disciples. From John 1 through John 12, the word love is used 12 times. From John 13 through John 21, the word love is used 44 times.

Love is the theme of His farewell.

Love was Jesus' burden when He prayed for unity among His followers in John 17. He prayed, “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the *love* you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (v. 26, emphasis added).

Loving one another distinguishes us from unbelievers. Loving one another is God's transforming power in all relationships.

According to the testimony of the early Christian apologist Tertullian (A.D. 155–240), the pagans said about the early Christians, “See how they love one another?”

The pagans witnessed these early Christians washing the feet of others. They even saw them lay down their own lives for the Lord, for His name, and for others.

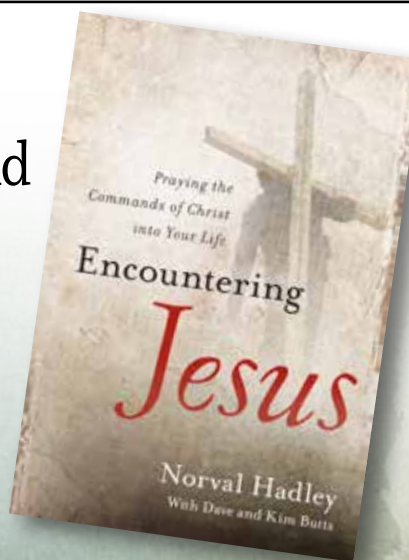
When Jesus said, “I give you a new command,” He was speaking of a new kind of love that is personal and fresh. Theologically, the death of Jesus Christ is the only way we can get right with God, and it is the coming of the Holy Spirit that sets our hearts afire with love!

The specific word for *love* used in John 13:34 expresses purpose. It is the kind of love that gives of self completely and unselfishly. It is a love that calls us to lay down our lives for others and to seek the welfare of others.

Love like this transforms people and can transcend all problems within relationships. Love like this is a new kind of love, and the Holy Spirit ignites us to love even our enemies. Jesus said, “I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). This is extraordinary love based on the depth of God's love for His Son Jesus, and for each of us.

Would you like help in obeying the second half of the Great Commission?

When Jesus charged us to go into all the world to share the gospel, He added “Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. . . .” This was Jesus' method for turning converts into disciples.



Encountering Jesus shows you how to pray the truth of 30 of these commands into your own life and then teach them to others. By teaching the commands the verse says you qualify for many promised blessings such as “Whoever keeps and teaches them (these commands) he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

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Even in his epistles, John addressed this kind of love. With boldness he declared, “Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love his brother or sister” (1 John 3:10).

Jesus is calling us to forgive, release, forget, and even to seek out those who offend us and love them in a better way. Jesus calls us to love people just as He loves us: willfully, sacrificially, and unconditionally.

Because God has loved us, we are to love one another. When we belong to Jesus, we belong to love.

How Wide Is Jesus’ Love?

Love One Another spans all generations, all ethnicities, and all languages.

Each of the 350,000+ churches and 200 denominations in America needs to live up to these profound, life-changing, transforming words of Jesus: love one another!

God’s greatest footprint on our nation is the hundreds of thousands of churches across our country. Each church can host a prayer observance for America on the National Day of Prayer, or a few can join with each other to cover their region in prayer.

While our task of mobilizing unified public prayer for America is daunting and intimidating, it is not impossible.

A Day of More Prayer

We need to resolve to make Thursday, May 2, 2019, the day America is prayed for more than any other day this year. We need millions of people to pray for America on the National Day of Prayer.

We may differ with one another at times, but we can always love one another. Love is our highest duty to God and to one another. Love is the badge of our discipleship. Love is what sets us apart from others.

Jesus did not say that we are known by our creeds, songs, doctrine, knowledge,

achievements, dress, appearance, or the color of our skin. *We are only known by our love.*

We need a baptism of love by the Holy Spirit that will immerse the entire Church of Jesus Christ and our entire nation in a baptism of love. This kind of love must begin in the church houses of America, and then go to the state houses

of America, and ultimately go all the way to America’s White House.

Loving one another *will* transform America. 🇺🇸



DR. RONNIE FLOYD is president of the National Day of Prayer Task Force. His website is ronniefloyd.com.

THE NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

MAY 2, 2019



★ PRAY FOR AMERICA ★

LOVE ONE
ANOTHER

LOVE ONE ANOTHER. JUST AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.
JOHN 13:34



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Distinguished

The Mark of Every Christian



BY J. KIE BOWMAN

in LOVE

The people of my church love the Bible. So I wasn't surprised when a group of men launched a study of one of today's most popular systematic theology books to help them better understand Scripture. They met each week for months, enthusiastically reading and discussing what they learned.

One day, while I was studying to prepare a message on prayer, I reached for that book as a resource. Yet I was amazed how little it said about prayer. In fact, in almost 1,300 pages devoted to theology, prayer is mentioned on about 20 pages—roughly 1.5 percent of the book.

That scarcity piqued my curiosity, so I consulted a two-volume systematic theology reference by a different contemporary author. In more than 1,600 pages in two volumes, prayer is mentioned on about 18 pages. In other words, the word prayer is mentioned in slightly more than one percent of the book.

Even more intrigued, I turned my

attention to other major biblical themes, wondering how theologians treated them.

If only a few pages devoted to prayer is surprising, the number of pages devoted to love may be even more so. For instance, in the 1,600 pages of the two-volume set, love is mentioned on two pages. Similarly, in the 1,300-page, single-volume work, love is mentioned three times.

Theologians obviously have their reasons for limiting the discussion of these major biblical themes. But, as followers of Christ, we can't afford to devote only one percent of our attention to love and prayer if we hope to grow strong in our faith.

The Prayer-Love Link

In contrast, throughout Scripture the themes of love and prayer are revisited hundreds of times. In fact, the words themselves occur about 500 times each in the Word of God. One of the most prominent New Testament passages that discusses love and

prayer together clearly teaches that love is a distinguishing mark of the Christian life. Prayer causes love to fill every corner of our lives. Stated another way, we need to pray for more love.

In Ephesians 3:14–19, we find one of the most powerful prayers in the Bible. Paul displays his spiritual depth and mastery of spiritual truth as he expresses his prayer for the Church. In verse 14 he clearly refers to his own prayer life when he says, “I bow my knees before the

Father.”¹ Then, in an almost dizzying updraft of ascending concepts, he talks about the blessings in the riches of God’s glory, the powerful anointing of the Holy Spirit, Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, and more.

Paul reaches a summit and settles his prayer upon love. He concludes that everything God’s Spirit does on our behalf is so that we may be “rooted and grounded in love” (v. 17). Once we are firmly planted on the foundation

of love, he prays we all might experience the Spirit’s strengthening power until we come to know “the breadth and length and height and depth” of Christ’s love—even though he acknowledges Christ’s love “surpasses knowledge” (vv. 18–19).

Paul obviously prayed in the rare air of heavenly realms. He often soars so high above our ordinary thoughts we virtually suffer altitude sickness just trying to keep up!

WHAT LOVE LOOKS LIKE

A Pastor, His Church, and California’s Deadliest Wildfire

The small town of Magalia, CA, rests in the foothills of the northern stretch of the Sierra Nevada. There are only a few main roads in or out. So when the Camp Fire (named for its origin near Camp Creek Road) came roaring toward the town in November 2018, the 10,000 residents had limited options for their forced evacuation.

Pastor Doug Crowder of Magalia Pines Baptist Church knew some elderly and destitute people would not be able to leave without help. So Crowder gathered about 30 of them at his church.

The fire first engulfed Paradise (just south of Magalia), which cut off that escape route for Crowder’s crew. They hunkered down in the church, and after the sun went down, the danger grew for those in Magalia.

As the skies turned red, Crowder went out in the middle of the night to find a sheriff’s deputy, who had just come up from Paradise. The deputy gave

him directions to get out, and they were loading everyone into vehicles when the fire overwhelmed the town.

“We were in the driveway planning to leave,” Crowder told Baptist Press through tears, “and the entire world erupted.”

Next to the church were a few businesses and some woods, where there had been no fire. But suddenly “the woods exploded,” Crowder said. “The Subway restaurant across the street exploded, and on all sides of us was fire.”

The sudden inferno left the group with only one option: retreat into the church building, close the doors, and pray.

Praying through the Night

Pastor Crowder described a scene of fire consuming the surrounding buildings and myriad explosions as flames ignited propane tanks all around them. Through the night, while the blaze surrounded

them, the Magalia residents prayed together and encouraged one another.

“As the day began to dawn,” Crowder recalled to a group at First Baptist Church of Gridley, “we went outside, and there were no more restaurants and no more hardware store. None of the things touching us were there. They were disintegrated and gone.”

Crowder and the survivors walked out into the parking lot, and they could see a wall of fire moving “steadily onward down into the canyon” where the homes of many of Magalia’s residents were located.

The group had just made it through what turned out to be California’s deadliest, most destructive wildfire. With the help of some rain, the Camp Fire was finally contained and extinguished. A few weeks after the fire started, National Public Radio (NPR) reported that the death toll had reached 88 people with hundreds more still unaccounted for.

Of the victims who had been identified,

Extreme Nature of Christian Love

But let's bring this prayer down to earth for a moment and ask a couple of practical questions:

1. If Paul prayed for us to experience love, shouldn't we pray for others to experience love, too?
2. Why do we need to pray for love?

First, the words love and prayer don't often appear in the same passage in the New Testament, but when they do we

find a remarkable consistency with Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. For instance, when he wrote to the Philippians, his thoughts, while more subdued, were almost identical to his intercession in the Ephesian prayer. When he wrote to the church at Philippi, he said, "It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment" (Phil. 1:9). Once again, Paul demonstrated a strategy of praying for believers to experience love.

By David Melber

NPR said only two were not senior citizens. Without Pastor Crowder's efforts, gathering some of the elderly in his community, they might have perished in the fire as well.

As Crowder stood in the parking lot, staring down at the receding wall of fire, a woman next to him (whom he had not known before) said, "I'm so blessed." Crowder listened to her story. She had lost her home and her car. She had no place to go except a friend's house in the nearby town of Chico. "But," she said, "God brought us through."

Surviving Miraculously

The church building, the property, and the people were all "unscathed—totally," Crowder told Baptist Press. "As we looked around and everything [was] disintegrated, God's house [was] still standing, not smoke-touched," he told the group in Gridley. "The landscape wasn't burned. Our cars were all sitting around [the church]. God just said, 'Not today,' and covered us."

The day after the fire's attack, those who huddled in Magalia Pines Baptist Church were finally able to evacuate. Those without a place to go were escorted to shelters.

Crowder, along with many who

survived the fire, lost his home and nearly everything he owned. Many of his parishioners and neighbors have a long road to recovery. They mourn lost homes, lost loved ones, and irreplaceable heirlooms.

Loving So Others Live

Every year, thousands of Southern Baptist volunteers respond to disasters such as the Camp Fire in order to bring help, healing, and the hope of the gospel to those in need. Southern Baptist Disaster Relief brings great spiritual and physical aid after floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and fires.

In every disaster, however, we also hear accounts of pastors and other believers like Pastor Crowder who minister to others as crises loom and break over their communities.

Crowder told Baptist Press that on the Sunday after the fire came through (Nov. 11), he had planned to share a sermon illustration about the words on a pin he received during his military days: "These things we do that others may live."

"I didn't get to preach it," Crowder said, "but we got to live it."

DAVID MELBER serves as president of Send Relief, the compassion ministry arm of the Southern Baptist Convention.

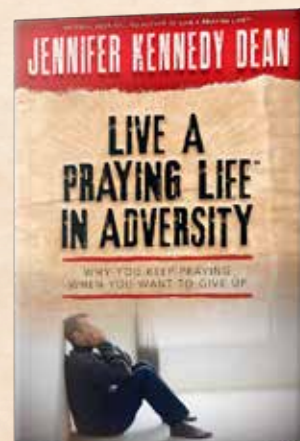
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But again, why do we need to pray for love?

One reason to pray for one another to love concerns the extreme nature of Christian love. God's love goes way beyond the sentimentality or superficiality of what our increasingly empty culture peddles as love. For instance, in describing the second greatest commandment, Jesus called each of us to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). Later, the Spirit inspired Paul to instruct Christian husbands to love their wives, just "as Christ loved the church" (Eph. 5:25).

Think about these commands: Love your neighbor with the same intensity as you love yourself. Husbands, love your wives with the same intensity the Lord loved us—even as He died for us. These passages offer extreme challenges if we take them seriously. Given the high bar Scripture sets, it only makes sense that this kind of love requires God's help.

So another reason to pray for one another is that each of us needs God's help to be able to love each other. And we need to pray others will be able to love as well. The truth is, if God doesn't help us, this kind of selfless love will likely continue to elude us.

Example of Jesus' Love

Since we are called to "love one another" in the same way that Jesus loves us (John 13:34), here are three ways to pray:

- Pray for more love for other believers, so you can reflect the love of Christ within the Church (John 13:34).
- Pray God will give you a Jesus kind of love for your spouse and family, so our homes reflect the Lordship of Christ (Eph. 5:25).
- Pray for other believers in your church to be more loving as a witness to the life-transforming power

of the Spirit (Eph. 3:17–18).

As twenty-first-century believers, we are confronted with aggressive challenges to our faith. Our culture can be brutal at times, hostile to Christians. And we are more polarized as a nation than at any period in our lifetimes. What will ever bring people back together again?

Love can. The uniting of prayer and love, as Scripture teaches, will mark us as His in a world that needs both His love and ours. 🇺🇸

¹This and all references in this article are from the English Standard Version.



J. KIE BOWMAN is senior pastor of Hyde Park Baptist Church, Austin, TX. He is the author of two books (*I Am and The King and His Community*), and he networks with other pastors to grow the 24/7 prayer movement for spiritual awakening in his city.

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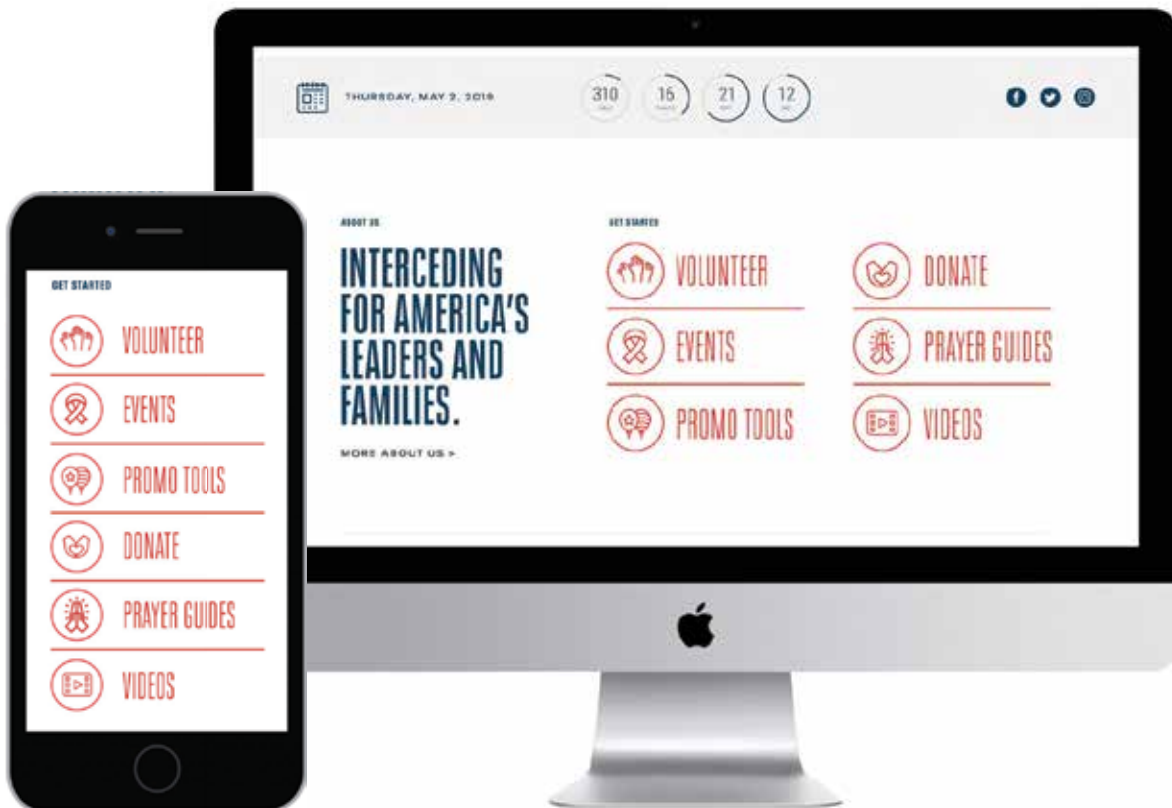
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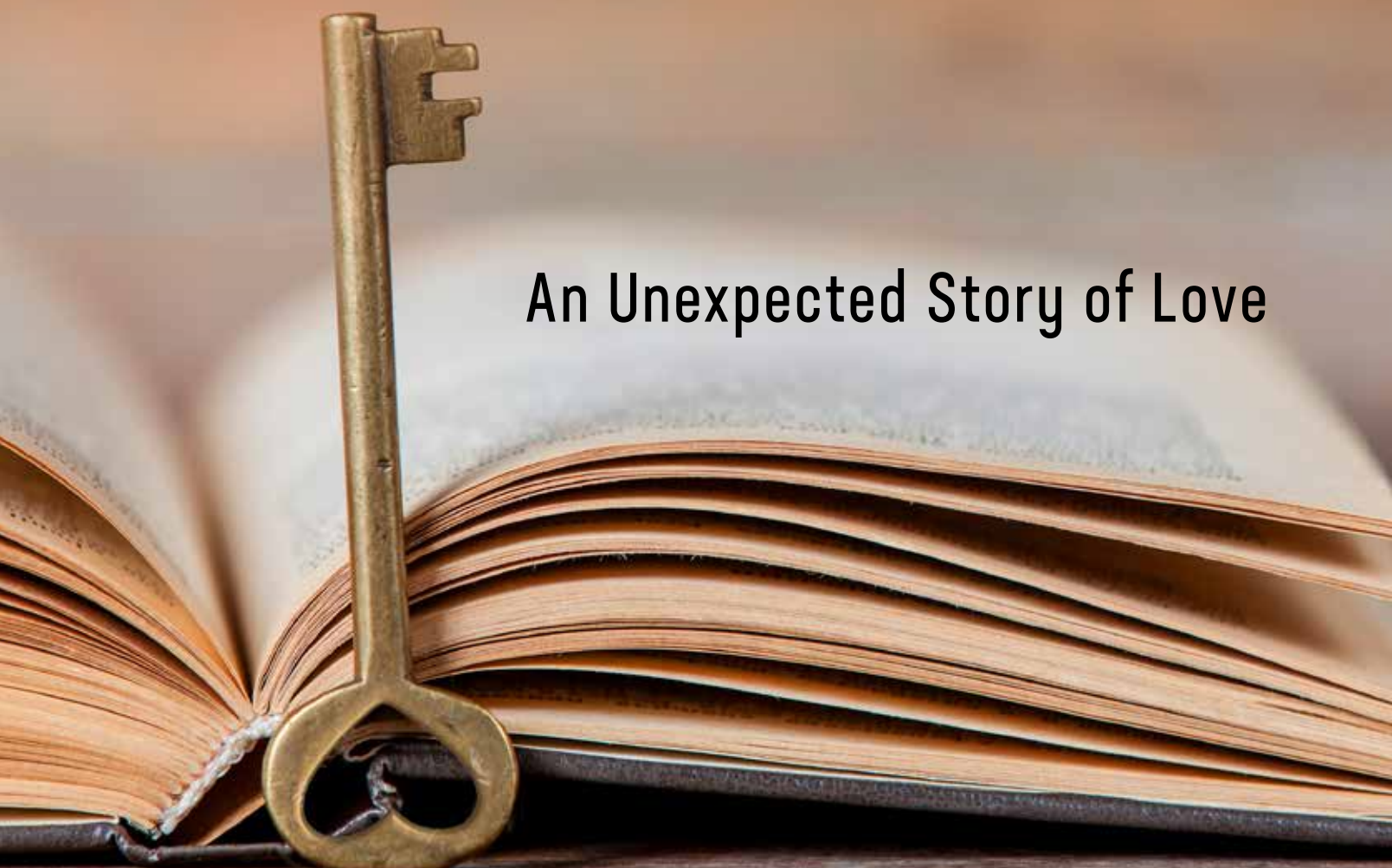
Check out the newly launched National Day of Prayer website at www.nationaldayofprayer.org.



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PRAY



An Unexpected Story of Love

FOR

NE

BY MATT LOCKETT
and WILL FORD

Can prayer affect the current division in the nation, or are we doomed to eat the fruit of historical offenses? Slavery ended, and segregation is no more. However, old wounds remain unhealed, racism is alive and well, and class division and systemic inequality persist. From past experience, we (Matt and Will) can testify that God still has an alternate ending in mind.

In 2003, Will was reading and praying aloud from the “I Have a Dream” speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., during a prayer gathering at Dr. King’s historic church in Montgomery, AL. Toward the end of the speech, Will read the words, “I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.”²

What an inspiring vision of a great reversal, changing former enemies into brothers!

While praying, Will—an African American and son of former slaves—remembered

a curious artifact passed down in their family: a 200-year-old cast iron kettle used by his Christian slave ancestors. The pot was used for cooking and washing clothes, but it was also used in an unexpected way. In the secrecy of night, slaves would sneak into the barn and turn that huge kettle upside down. With its edge propped up on rocks, they would lay prostrate on the ground, tucking their lips under its edge, and pray. The kettle would muffle their voices as they prayed through the night, and their master couldn’t hear them as they prayed for slavery to end and for the freedom of the next generation.

Mindful of that story, Will wondered whatever happened to those slave owners. For the first time, he began to pray for the family who once owned his family. Instead of expressing anger for their oppression in the past, he prayed for the next generation, as his ancestors had so long ago. The twist was that he found himself praying for the spiritual freedom and blessing of the generation descended from those slave owners.

YOUR ENEMIES

Two years later we (Will and Matt) providentially met in a prayer gathering at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. It happened to be Martin Luther King Day, and we stood on the very spot where Dr. King had spoken the historic words, “I have a dream.” A surprising friendship began, and together we started to lead prayer gatherings for unity and racial healing around the country.

A decade later, some unknown family history emerged. Matt learned that the final battle of the American Civil War—The Battle of Lockett’s Farm—was fought in the front yard of his ancestors. *What a strange coincidence*, we thought. Will’s family has a kettle that has been handed down along with the story of the slaves who prayed for freedom. And Matt’s family owns the land where the Civil War ended. More dots connected, which led to a far more profound discovery.

Unforgettable Shock

That more profound discovery we made came as quite a shock. Imagine our amazement when we learned that it was actually Matt’s family who had owned Will’s family as slaves! The rich details of our story are carefully laid out in our new book *The Dream King*.

But consider what that revelation meant for us. Even though our families had been enemies in the past, prayer brought us together and made us brothers. Surely Dr. King’s words were more than poetry. Perhaps they were prophecy.

Today, here we sit, looking at each other across the table of brotherhood, forgetting the other was ever our enemy. We believe this is the story God wants to tell throughout the nation.

Jesus’ Great Challenge

Some say loving our enemies is the most difficult challenge Jesus issued: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:43–45).

Are we quick to label someone as an enemy? By definition, an enemy is “one who is antagonistic to another, especially one seeking to injure, overthrow, or confound an opponent.”¹ With that measuring line, we all could make a sizable list of people or groups who seem to fit that description.

And so it begins. We make our lists, taking account of all the wrongs and abuses we have suffered. The lists grow, and the painful memories harden like names etched into drying concrete that will be readable for centuries.

To identify someone as an enemy seems to demand a response. If it does not lead to aggressive actions toward the foe, it often produces bitterness toward the adversary in our hearts. What can

disrupt this process of pain and retaliation? Who has the necessary willpower to resist becoming exactly like our abuser after hate has run its course?

The answer is hidden in plain sight.

Prayer That Changes the Story

Apart from prayer, our painful experiences freeze people in a timeframe of offense. It’s as though the end of the story comes immediately after the tragedy and ruin. However, prayer makes a better ending possible.

Jesus carefully linked the call to love our enemies with the activity of praying for them. Prayer is not the passive response of the weak and timid. It is arguably the believer’s greatest form of direct action and activism.

Prayer for our enemies creates an opportunity for an alternate ending to an otherwise tragic storyline. Through prayer, we can wage a strategic attack against the darkness that has overwhelmed our abusers—and thus liberate them from their own oppression. Prayer carves out the space in which our enemies may change.

Needless to say, it changes us as well. Wounds receive their divine healing balm, and the heart softens in the process. The chasm of division can narrow, new bridges can be built, and a story can end with the embrace of a former enemy.

Jesus had the authority to call us to this unexpected and difficult command because He demonstrated it in its highest form. As He hung on the cross, bleeding from the wounds of His abusers, He knew humanity would not be His enemy forever. With His final gasping breaths, He uttered prayers that opened a new way to restore our relationship with Him.

The words, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,” give us a guide for our own prayers for anyone attacking us. The laying down of His own life meant that humanity’s enemy status would not be the end of

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the story. God calls us to live our lives by that extraordinary example.

Jesus was and is the ultimate Peacemaker. When we react in the opposite spirit of our enemies, we follow in the footsteps of the Righteous One. Instead of taking revenge, He prayed for His torturers' forgiveness. When retaliation was within His power, He instead showed mercy.

This radical change in the posture of our hearts is the key that unlocks redemptive storylines. Individuals will be set free when we pray for them with restoration in mind instead of judgment. Families will experience generational blessings when we pray to heal wounds that have festered year after year. Let's dare to believe that a nation will alter its course toward righteousness when we pray for light and truth to shine on those leading multitudes down a dark path. The Son of God led us into this

redemptive work, saying, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt. 5:9).

Prayer Is the Key

It's no accident that we met in a prayer meeting. We believe we will all truly find each other in the prayer meetings, where God will give us His heart for each other and end the division that once defined us as enemies.

God intends to answer the prayer of His Son, Jesus, who prayed in John 17 that we would be one so that the world would believe. Glory comes when division ends and former enemies embrace. That kind of supernatural work gets the attention of the world and leads to a saving belief in Him.

The hidden hand of God is hard at work, weaving our lives together in ways we could never have imagined. The one

who looks like our enemy today could become our closest friend tomorrow, and God gets the glory when that happens.

Retaliation against enemies will cement the divisions that exist, but God has a divine remedy to turn the conflicts into a blessing. Pray for your enemies, and usher in God's alternate ending to an otherwise tragic storyline. 📖

¹ Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enemy>.

² Martin Luther King, Jr. "I Have a Dream," <https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>.



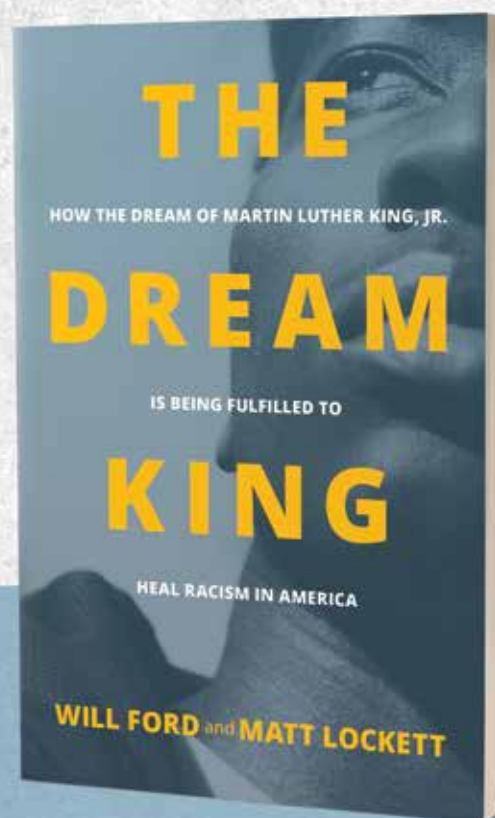
MATT LOCKETT and WILL FORD are the founders of Dream Stream Company (dreamstreamcompany.com).

Their new book *The Dream King* tells the true story of the way their lives are woven together by history and the hidden hand of God. It exposes systemic injustice and delivers new keys for understanding the nation's past, present, and future.

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A photograph of a man in a blue shirt, seen from the back and side, with his hands being placed on his shoulders by two other people. The scene is set outdoors at sunset or sunrise, with a warm, golden light in the background. The man has a beard and is looking down. The hands on his shoulders are from people whose faces are not visible. The overall mood is one of support and prayer.

A PRAYER

The Practice of Extraordinary Love

BY KIM BUTTS

today's culture is desperate for a fresh infusion of extraordinary love. The Lord's Church has been uniquely designed to provide it. Yet many of us are distracted or even paralyzed by the negative, angry, polarizing climate surrounding us.

This prayer guide examines what Scripture says about love, and then encourages God's people to pray and boldly demonstrate that extraordinary love in action. May we as believers be known as people who love completely and without reservation or hesitation so that many will be drawn to Jesus, the source of such great love.

1 ■ **Love God completely so that you can love others completely.**
■ *"Jesus said: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:37–39).*

Many of us agree wholeheartedly with these two commandments. However, living them out with integrity, purpose, and humility is often difficult. We need great courage so we do not shrink away from actively and passionately pursuing this mandate from the Father.

My Prayer: Lord Jesus, when You were asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" You didn't hesitate. You gave us two! Show me what it means to love this much. Teach me how to love You so well that love for others naturally flows from Your heart into mine—and then into the lives of the people all around me.

2 ■ **Love your enemies with supernatural love.**
■ *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. . . . If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?" (Matt. 5:43–46).*

GUIDE

Scripture tells us clearly that our enemy is *not* other people: “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). We must fight the right battle by refusing to hate those we perceive as enemies. Instead, although it’s completely countercultural, God says we are to love them and pray for them.

My Prayer: Father, I struggle with some of the people in my life who have set their hearts against me, or who have wronged me or someone I love. Remind me daily that these people are not my enemies. Show me ways to pray for them so that my heart will soften and change. Nurture within me a heart filled with forgiveness, and remove any bitterness. I know that in my own flesh I can’t love them extraordinarily, but with You all things are possible. Please give me a

supernatural love that transcends my feelings and emotions. I trust You to love through me even when it is difficult!

3. Love others without condition.
“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34).

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love” (John 15:9–10).

We may casually throw around the words *unconditional love* yet still put conditions upon loving, such as “if you agree with me, I will love you,” or “if you look like I do, I will love you.”

This happens often in families and friendships. People are emotionally blackmailed into changing their points of view, lifestyles, or thought patterns to make

peace or to receive the love of others. However, if God is love—and He *is*—His followers must unconditionally extend love to others because He first loved us and commands us to love as He loves.

My Prayer: Heavenly Father, You created each of us uniquely, and I know You want us to love one another no matter the circumstances surrounding our relationships. Teach me what it means to “remain” in Your great love so that You can show me how to supernaturally love those who think, act, talk, or respond differently than I do. Fill my heart with love that overcomes my temptation to marginalize or separate those who are unlike me. Help me to learn to love with a no-strings-attached love that comes from You, the One who *is* love.

4. Love with the genuine love of Christ.
“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom. 12:9–10).

It is much easier to *say* we love someone than to *demonstrate* it in a tangible way. We do not have to compromise what is right and good in order to love. We are compelled as Christ-followers to love genuinely: to hate the activity of the devil while still loving even those who carry out his work. Our love for others is to be faithful and fervent, and we are to bless and honor others above ourselves.

My Prayer: God of Grace, sometimes I feel as if I have a heart of stone instead of a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26). Please awaken the Spirit of the Living Christ in my heart so that I might love with a sincerity that is true. Show me the evil I need to abhor and the good I must honestly embrace. Establish within me a deep humility so that I can honor others above myself.

5. Love through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.
“I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by



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the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me" (Rom. 15:30).

Jesus is God's ultimate gift of love! Jesus lives to intercede for us. He is our continual mediator before God: "He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:25). Every prayer Jesus prays on our behalf is the perfect will of God for us. It is His gift to us and the example of how we should continually pray for one another.

My Prayer: Father, it amazes me to think that Jesus, who lives in me, also intercedes before You on my behalf. Your great love for me resulted in the birth, death, and resurrection of Your own Son so that I might live forever. Please awaken within me the love of the Spirit so that every prayer I pray is one I offer from a heart of love in Jesus Christ.

6. Serve others in love, not out of obligation or duty.
"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love" (Gal. 5:13).

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2).

When everything we do and say is from the loving heart of Jesus, it becomes extraordinary, supernatural love. When we love well, it changes everything about our attitudes in serving others.

My Prayer: God of Love, I could spend the rest of my life plumbing the depths of Your amazing love. I'm grateful for how specific You are in teaching me through Your Word what love is like. Jesus, I want my love to look like Yours. Give me the grace to embrace the kind of love that "never fails" so that I can serve others in humility.

7. Love others in a spirit of unity.
"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any

common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind" (Phil. 2:1–2).

The world needs to see the great love believers have for one another. If the world is to take Christianity seriously, believers must demonstrate how such love compels them to go out into their culture. It is then that we become the answer to the prayer Jesus prayed in John 17:22–23: "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

My Prayer: Righteous Father, show me what it means to be united in love with those who love You. We are all different

in so many ways, and yet You call us to a higher level of love—the kind of love that brings all Your followers together as one in Spirit. Help me, in turn, to demonstrate that life-giving love to a lost world.

Take time to seek ways God wants you to experience His love, and then extend the love He has given you beyond yourself to others. One way to foster unity in loving relationships and demonstrate the extraordinary love of God to our love-hungry world is to join with others in planning or participating in a community-wide National Day of Prayer event on May 2, 2019. 🇺🇸



KIM BUTTS is cofounder and vice president of Harvest Prayer Ministries (harvestprayer.com). She is the author of several books, including *The Praying Family: Creative Ways to Pray Together*, available at prayershop.org.

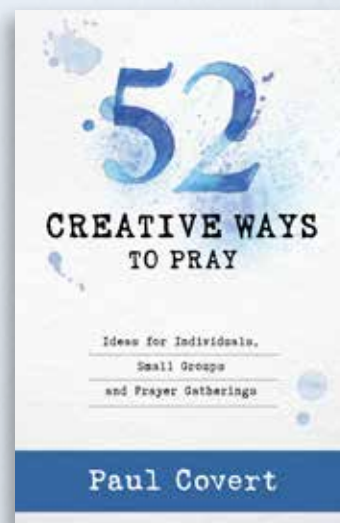
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The Unwanted Gift



By Eleanor Shepherd

of

Unanswered Prayer



As the train sped through the French countryside in early February 2013, I spent my time praying for my son repeatedly. “Lord, You can do anything. Please keep John safe as he travels this weekend.”

I felt restless. I even doubted that God was hearing my prayers. But I was compelled to seek Him on behalf of my son.

That Sunday night we were traveling on the high-speed train from Valence, in the south of France, back to our home in Paris.

Although my body was in France, my mind and heart were in North America with our children. John, then studying in Boston, had driven to Montreal that weekend to attend a conference and visit his sister Elizabeth. I was worried because I knew road conditions could be treacherous in winter.

The next morning, during my morning prayer time at home, my

heart tightened when the phone rang. Our daughter Elizabeth, calling from Montreal, said that John had been in a car accident. Stunned, I listened to her report. John’s vehicle had hit black ice and rolled over. His neck was broken from the impact. John was paralyzed.

My prayers had not been answered.

During the following months, a kaleidoscope of emotions jumbled together with questions. I tried to understand why God did not answer my prayer. What if I had prayed in a different way? What if my prayers had focused on surrendering to His sovereignty more than insistent pleading? Would it have made a difference?

Certainty in the Answer

All of us, at one time or another, have experienced unanswered prayer. We have poured our hearts out to God with a desired outcome, only to find God not answering the way we

had hoped. Some of us struggle even now, trying to understand why God has not intervened and responded to a long-standing prayer of our hearts.

What provides a glimmer of hope for me is the way Jesus prayed, as recorded in Hebrews 4:15: “We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”

As God, Jesus is sovereign, yet He also knows what it is like to contend with the challenges we face—even unanswered prayers.

I think of Jesus, kneeling in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–42). I note His transparency. He does not pretend that He easily embraces the suffering that threatens Him. He is honest and says to the Father, “If it is possible, don’t let this happen to me! Father, you can do anything. Don’t make me suffer by having me drink from this cup” (v. 36, CEV).

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These words of Jesus take me back to my urgent prayers on that train in France. I had prayed that God would protect John from any harm that might come his way.

But Jesus concluded His prayer in the garden, telling His Father, "Do what you want, and not what I want." Perhaps Jesus could say that because He had the absolute certainty that what the Father wanted was best for His Son—and for everyone impacted for all eternity.

In fact, after praying in the garden and then facing His accusers, Jesus was certain that the choice of the Father was the right one. When Peter drew a sword to defend His Master, Jesus confidently told Peter to put it away. Jesus confronted Peter with a question that revealed His determination: "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:11). He spoke out of His clear-sighted understanding that this is the way it must be.

Faith-building in Unanswered Prayers

What can we learn from Jesus' example about dealing with our "unanswered" prayers? We discover that unanswered prayers build faith.

One day Donna, my friend in another ministry, said to me, "Have you ever noticed that when a person comes to Christ, it seems like their prayers are answered so often, yet as they continue on their faith journey, the answers become less frequent?"

After further discussion, we concluded that this is one way the Lord enables Christians to grow in their faith. If all our prayers were answered without fail in just the way we desire, we would eventually take God for granted and fail to value all He does for us. We would be tempted to treat God like a vending machine, expecting to receive whatever we ask for. The result would be a shallow faith. In fact, we would be placing our faith in the effectiveness of our prayers

rather than trusting God for whatever way He might choose to answer.

Understanding that God does not always answer the way we expect Him to, forces us to go deeper. We then must ask ourselves hard questions: Have we lost our connection with Him? Does He have other plans for us? What is going on?

It forces us to intimately engage with God in even *more* fervent prayer.

Strength in Surrender

Questions and reflection teach us to trust confidently that God is in control of our lives, even if we do not understand what is happening. He always gives us a choice. We can hold onto our demands, or we can surrender them to Him and allow Him to work out all things for our good. The answers might not immediately bring happiness or satisfaction, but God always acts for our good (Rom. 8:28).

A statement I heard in a sermon once has remained with me: "You never know how much faith you have until it is tested." One way our faith is tested is that God doesn't always answer our prayers the way we believe He should.

While it is evident that Jesus fully embraced the Father's will for Him, it wasn't easy. In fact, He struggled so intensely in Gethsemane that, according to Dr. Luke, His "sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). As Jesus took upon Himself all our sins, He knew what was ahead: not only the agony of His torture and crucifixion but the fear of abandonment by His Father. He was saying yes to something beyond anything we can imagine.

Our yes to His will, even when it leads us to suffering, pales in comparison. Yet, like Jesus, we would prefer another option. God may not change the circumstances He permits, but He will not force us to accept that this is part of His will. Our strength is found in our relinquishment.

Answers in Time!

Now, more than 15 years after John's accident, adjustment to his new life as a quadriplegic has been extremely difficult. Some of my prayers have remained unanswered. Others not. After about eight years, John told me he had finally dealt with his anger over the accident. That was a huge answer to my prayers.

However, throughout his lengthy struggle to find employment, we did not find an answer as quickly. Three years after the accident John went back to school and completed his MBA from Harvard Business School. But a well-educated young man, finding himself seemingly unemployable because of physical limitations, needs huge amounts of courage to keep going each day.

God continues to answer this prayer. John has used his time profitably. He has scoured all the journals and books avail-

able about spinal cord injury. At his own expense, he developed an online program to help people with spinal cord injuries. Currently John is working to achieve the academic credentials needed to speak and to teach people with serious long-term diseases some ways they can live and thrive.

The Gift in Unanswered Prayer

Is unanswered prayer really a gift? At first it seemed like an unwanted gift, but after my initial disappointment in my prayers for John, I discovered something even greater. When we surrender our prayers—and the answers—to God, He uses the seemingly unanswered prayers:

- to develop faith
- to test that faith and refine us as our faith holds

- to discover that His strength is ours through our willing relinquishment to His sovereignty
- and to find our joy in His plans and purposes for us in our imperfect situations.

As difficult as it has been to go through this faith test surrounding John's accident, I'm learning that we can confidently ask God for the desires of our hearts, and we can rest assured that *His answer*, in His time, is part of His perfect plan for our lives. 📖



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A high-angle photograph of a man with dark, wavy hair, wearing a black t-shirt and blue jeans, kneeling on a dark floor. He is facing away from the camera, with his head bowed and hands held out flat on the floor in a gesture of prayer or surrender. The background is a light-colored brick wall. The title "Passing on a Spiritual Inheritance" is centered over the man's torso in a white serif font.

Passing on a Spiritual Inheritance

By Chris Barratt

LEAVING A *Legacy* OF PRAYER

Several months after his mother died, Franklin Graham remarked, “I’ll never forget the first time my mother heard me preach. Standing at the podium and seeing her in the shadows, I realized just how much that moment represented an answer to her faithful prayers. To follow in my father’s footsteps, I had to go through my mother’s knee prints.”¹

Ruth Graham’s giant “knee prints” are an amazing testimony of the way a life of prayer can leave a spiritual legacy. Many a night when the children crept past Ruth’s room, they found her, Bible in hand, kneeling by her bed, speaking to the Lord. When asked by the press how she raised five children with her husband (Dr. Billy Graham) frequently gone, she replied, “On my knees.”

Her life reflects a mother’s heart crying out on behalf of her husband, children, and people all over the world.

This legacy of prayer is one I desire to pass along. But is this magnitude of influence only possible to those “great saints” who came before us—those with more time, more depth of spirit, and fewer distractions? Are we destined to shallow, on-the-run, rote prayers dampened by our hectic times? Can we only hope for little, if any, results from our quick intercessions in crisis times?

God’s answer to these questions is an absolute *No*. John wrote, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14). And God Himself promises this: “Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me” (Ps. 50:15).

God's Word gives clear examples of prayers that are sustaining, far reaching, unceasing and never unheard. And because that's so desperately needed in the world today, why would we strive for anything less? Even as I examine my own prayer life, I believe we all need to be bold, open, intentional, and faithful if we want to leave a prayer legacy for our children and others who come after us.

Be Bold

Mark Batterson writes, "Bold prayers honor God, and God honors bold prayers."² It may surprise you, but God desires our bold, seemingly impossible prayers.

In our humanness, sometimes we forget (or at least our prayer lives reflect that we forget) that God really does run the universe and has control over it all. Certainly, it's important to come to the Lord with our daily needs, but it's usually those larger-than-life issues that keep us up at night as we think of possible scenarios and ways to "fix" them. Broken marriages, financial difficulties, health problems, wayward children, depression, anxiety—they can all appear hopeless. They seem impossible to our finite minds. I can't tell you how often trials have plagued me to the point of making me sick.

Why didn't I pray boldly and with faith—and then leave my requests with the Lord? Because as a "fixer," I was determined to remedy the situation myself and achieve human glory. But what if the Lord allowed these trials so that I would surrender and realize I can't fix everything—but He can? When I give a situation to Him, not only do I relieve my burdens, but He gets the glory. As it should be.

God wants our bold prayers, and the bolder they are, the more impact they have—for His glory. And when He shines through, the legacy we leave is that much more powerful.

Be Open

Jesus says, "Let your light shine before

others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). What light shines brighter than prayer? And what could bring more glory to God than answered prayer?

Mary Slessor, Scottish missionary to Nigeria, once wrote, "My life is one long daily, hourly, record of answered prayer."³ Bragging on God, she records ways He answered prayer regarding physical health, mental strain, guidance, finances, food, and a myriad of other things.

Rosalind Goforth, author of the book, *How I Know God Answers Prayer*, filled an entire volume with the miracles that comprised her life of service as a missionary to China. These believers, and countless others, tell of God's provision in their lives when all human attempts had long been exhausted.

Openly sharing answers to prayer not only points others to the Miracle Giver but also provides hope in a world desperately searching for it. How many times has someone lifted your day with the words, "I'm praying for you"? When God prompts you to pray for others, tell them. And when He answers your prayers, pass along the results.

Being open about our prayer lives can make a limitless impact on our circles of influence. There are far too few mentors passing on prayer legacies to future generations. But being a genuine, humble, prayer warrior creates a great example to a hungry world.

Be Intentional

Leaving a prayer legacy involves intention. We can't pass on anything we haven't cultivated in our own lives. So, when do you pray each day? Are you cultivating a time of Bible reading? Are you adding prayers that are daily, hourly, and intentional? Do your children see you pray? If so, how much?

Sadly, my own answers to these questions betray a lack in intentionality. And without fail, as soon we begin being intentional, the enemy will throw everything he can in our way to get us

off track. Our own strength won't be enough to counter the attacks. But God honors our attempts. When we show up, God's strength equips us for the battle.

George Müller was a man of intentional prayer. It's estimated he received more than \$1,500,000 in donations, cared for 10,024 orphans, and established 117 schools that offered Christian education to more than 120,000 children—all through prayer alone!

A.J. Rendle Short, who compiled *The Diary of George Müller: Great Man of Prayer*, wrote, "The principle is that close obedience to the will of God, revealed basically in the Bible, and day by day in His providential dealings, is rewarded by the fulfillment of His promises. The life of George Müller followed this principle and was singularly consistent."

The words, "day by day" and "singularly consistent," are keys to Müller's successful prayer life. Recorded in this volume are diary entries of daily, consistent prayer. What struck me upon reading his accounts is that Müller never doubted God heard him. Although he did become fearful at times—especially when they were down to their last few dollars or loaf of bread—he still took all his needs to the Lord, left them with Him, and waited. His strategy never varied.

It's tempting to pass off his success by thinking he was a special case—saint and dedicated servant—so, of course, why wouldn't God answer him? But, in reality, Müller was a scoundrel in his early life—a thief and drunkard, who even spent time in jail. He was on the level of all of us, a regular person. But he made an early decision to be intentional and depend solely on God for provision.

Although we know the outcome of George Müller's story, we can't see the end of our own. But one thing we can know for certain is that if we don't pray intentionally, our lives will reflect our lack of dependence on God. James tells us, "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (5:16).

Be effective, fervent, and intentional. Your legacy will reflect it.

Be Faithful

At times in our prayer lives, it may be tempting to throw in the towel. All of us—even those examples mentioned earlier—have moments of doubts and fears. We may fear our prayers are going no farther than the ceiling, cut short by the vast expanse of universe and peeling paint.

At those times, imagine a breakthrough just on the horizon. Think of the changes we could potentially witness as a result of our prayers for people around us—and even across the world. Think of the effect our prayers could have on a devastating cancer, a wayward child, a depressed husband, or some hopeless situation. Think of the ramifications our prayer lives can have with those who witness prayer's impact daily, weekly, monthly, and year after year.

Prayer Legacies Over Time

That is the way prayer legacies are built. Little by little. Day by day. A whole lot of holy desperation leading to holy tenacity. Remaining faithful until fruitfulness comes.

Sometimes we stop praying because we don't see results. But don't go by what you see. Go by what God says. And remember that "the prayer of the upright pleases him" (Prov. 15:8).

Remember Elijah, who prayed for rain after a three-year drought (1 Kings 18:41–46)? God calls us to that kind of faithful, persistent praying even though we might not see anything happening. There may be a miracle on the horizon.

Never give up! God is for us, and He responds to desperate people. His response may not be immediate, but it will be eventual. Everything possible in Elijah's day is also possible now.

If we remain bold, open, intentional, and faithful—and if we stay the course and never quit—then prayer will spread from one generation to the next.

Ruth Graham's "giant knee prints" are still producing spiritual fruit long after her death. And that is a legacy worth striving for. 🙏

¹Franklin Graham, "My Mother's Three Passions," Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. <https://billygraham.org/story/my-mothers-three-passions-2/> (June 14, 2018).

²Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; Expanded edition, 2016), 15.

³W.P. Livingstone, *Mary Slessor of Calabar* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2004), 247.



CHRIS BARRATT is the founder and CEO of Prevail Ministries, a ministry that helps believers live boldly and stand strong in turbulent times. Her work includes several publications and devotional books. You can connect with her at facebook.com/prevailministries.



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Strategic Prayer with Strangers

A longtime friend posted on social media that she was seeking opportunities to pray with strangers. She included an account of even praying with a pet-store salesperson who helped her find fish food.

She inspired me to follow her example. I worked up the courage to ask the first stranger I encountered. The woman was about to take my blood pressure and test my iron levels before I could give blood. A little hesitantly, I said, “I know this may sound odd, but God has put it on my heart to pray for people. Would you mind if I prayed for you right now—and is there anything for which I can pray for you?”

Although surprised, she smiled and thanked me. With tears in her eyes, she told me that she was trying to get back into church and to get her child there, too. After our short, but deep, conversation, we had no time left to pray together. But I assured her I would pray for the needs she shared with me.

I finished the blood donation process and didn’t cross paths with this woman again. But I’m hopeful God will use our short conversation to direct her to Christ.

Overcoming Hesitancy

Here are some simple steps for reaching out in prayer with a stranger, whether at a library, campout, parking lot, playground—or wherever God takes you.

- **Be in prayer.** Pray for God to make you aware of prayer opportunities. Pray for courage to take a risk. Pray for a heart to connect with people. Praying in advance will help you overcome any hesitancy.
- **Be intentional.** Notice the people around you as individuals instead of a mass of humanity—or worse, interruptions in your day. Look for ways to begin conversation. Listen well to the other person. A family I know often asks their server at a restaurant how they might pray for him or her before they give thanks for their meal. My family sometimes gives out “blessing bags” to homeless people we meet. We ask if we might pray for that person, too—but only *after* we’ve given the bag of helpful items.
- **Be polite.** After you’ve initiated a conversation, ask kindly if you might pray with the person. Some people



may say no, but simply showing interest in them can point them to our loving Father. Or, as in the case with the nurse prepping me for a blood donation, the person may share some heartfelt needs and leave you to pray for them by yourself.

- **Be mindful.** Remember to continue lifting that person up to the Lord on your own.

Many of us have heard or read stories of people asking God to show Himself to them—to convince them He’s real, that He cares for them. Your step of faith to initiate a short prayer could be the avenue God uses to reveal Himself to a hurting person. God can perfectly orchestrate your obedience to match the need of someone in desperate need of prayer.

ALLISON WILSON LEE writes and edits for Cru. She also homeschools her two sons in Orlando, FL. She blogs at presentmindedly.wordpress.com.

Praying for a Friend in a Bitter Ordeal

One of the two men standing at our front door said he was from the FBI. A local police officer accompanied him. They certainly had our attention when they asked if we were the parents of Luke (not his real name). We invited them to come inside and join us around our kitchen table on that summer evening. They informed us that our son had been arrested.

We had raised our children for the

Lord. *How could this be possible?* Unfortunately, it was true.

My humiliation was so great that I found it hard to tell anyone what had happened because I wasn’t sure whom I could trust not to gossip. My family walked through a dark time, feeling very alone.

There are broken, wounded, and incredibly vulnerable people in every church who are suffering themselves

from a painful ordeal or have a close family member who is. These heartbreaks may include:

- separation or domestic violence
- arrest and court dates with possible jail or prison sentence
- drug abuse and residential rehab for drugs
- suicide attempt and inpatient treatment
- molestation or rape.

Coming Alongside

The following are some ways to pray with, and for, friends going through any bitter affliction:

- When you find out they are suffering a heartbreaking situation, ask how, specifically, you can pray for them and their family. Follow up frequently.
- Assure them you can be trusted to keep information confidential.
- Tell them you care for all their family members and will pray for every person by name. A private tragedy impacts each family member differently.
- Pray for God's grace, peace, and presence in their lives during their ordeal. They will most likely ask why God is allowing this trial. Gently pray with them to find a place of acceptance of the situation.
- If your friend is the victim of a

crime, pray for emotional and physical healing. Include healing from flashbacks, along with grace and stamina to endure the investigation and court dates. If you have the opportunity, compassionately suggest professional Christian counseling.

- Pray with them for specifics about the next court date, next jail visit, next family counseling session, etc., as these come up.
- Lovingly and consistently pray for grace and encouragement for them and their family.

When you take the risk and gently step into their lives, they will never forget the way God provided someone to be there for them during the bitterness of their trial.

M.A. VINCENT is a freelance writer from the Chicago area. She is involved in her church and community, including pro-life prayer ministry.

Will You Pray with Us?

Thank you for partnering with us in prayer. If we are going to publish an effective magazine on prayer, we need to be the first to ask for intercession from our friends! So please join us in these requests:

- Pray for the National Day of Prayer staff as they prepare for the thousands of prayer events across the nation. Pray especially for the broadcast from Washington, D.C., on the evening of Thursday, May 2, led by Dr. Ronnie Floyd and produced by Dr. Bob Bakke. Ask the Lord to engage believers across our nation in praying for revival and spiritual awakening.
- Pray that God will use *PRAY* editor Carol Madison's newly released book (*Prayer That's Caught and Taught*) to inspire people to begin mentoring the next generation in prayer. Pray for opportunities for Carol to continue to write and teach about mentoring.
- Pray that *PRAY* magazine will see a dramatic increase in subscriptions, advertising, and financial stability. Ask the Lord to encourage the staff with favor from subscribers.
- Pray for Jon Graf, publisher of both *PRAY* magazine and PrayerShop Publishing, to have wisdom in how to market products, fulfill orders, and envision new publications that will inspire the prayer movement.
- Ask God to use *PRAY* magazine as a quality publication that brings glory to God and inspires the Church to pray!

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Praying for the Greatest Thing | By Bill Elliff

I had never been hurt so deeply. When I learned that my pastor-father had committed adultery, I was devastated. Through a long, unfolding story, my dad later came to repentance beside my mother's deathbed, but only after he had left her and married another. Later, his new wife also repented and sought our forgiveness, which we gave.

It was easy to love my dad, for I had loved him all my life. I forgave my new step-mother, but I did not love her. Even though I was a 32-year-old pastor, I had no desire to even see her. But God had other plans and a deeper purpose.

"We're coming through town," my dad said over the phone. "Could we see you?"

For the first time as an adult I realized there was a person I simply could not love on my own. I saw the absolute incapacity of mere human love. But God reminded me that He lived in me and that He *is* love. I remembered that His love can be "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 5:5, KJV).

And so, I prayed: "Lord, You live in me. You are all the love I need. Here is my body for Your use. Flow Your love through me."

When I saw her, in one of the greatest illustrations of the reality of God I've ever experienced, I was overwhelmed with love for her. And I've continued to love her for more than 30 years.

Needing Real Love

In the greatest chapter on the greatest thing, Paul proclaims that love is the highest attribute. He defines its necessity in absolutes.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, *I have become a noisy gong or a clanging*

cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, *I am nothing*. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, *it profits me nothing* (1 Cor. 13:1–3, NASB, emphasis mine).

The Apostle reminds us that without this most important thing, all we *are* is nothing, all we *do* is nothing, and all we *receive* from all we do is nothing. What a tragedy to come to the end of a busy life, stand before God, and realize all we did produced no real results.

This year's National Day of Prayer theme is "Love One Another." How can we lead others to pray in ways that loving one another becomes a reality across our nation?

Getting Love Out

As prayer leaders, one of our roles is to help others realize that the Spirit inside them provides all the love they need. The issue is not getting love *in* but getting love *out*. Here are three principles we can teach our congregations about the believer's role as an instrument of God's love:

1. Recognize God-ordained opportunities for love's release. It's easy to love your friends. But we have a greater witness when we love our enemies and pray for those who spitefully use us and say all manner of evil against us falsely.

These are not intrusions to the Christian life, but God-ordained moments for the God within you to show off His love! In prayer, embrace each opportunity to manifest His passion to a watching world.

2. Pray for love in the body of Christ. The greatest damage to the

Kingdom of God in our nation occurs when we who profess love do not show it among God's people. Yet, shouldn't that be where we most easily experience and prominently portray it?

Believers who are walking in love disagree agreeably. They give each other the benefit of the doubt. They never gossip or slander but deal with conflicts in biblical ways. They have a heart for preserving the "unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Pray daily for the churches in your community. Ask God for a revival of love that will explode in affection for each other before a watching world.

3. Pray for love in action. If love is flowing, we will witness to those far from God and we will serve them. Let's pray that God will release so much love, through the Church in America, that we are compelled to serve those around us in every imaginable way.

Praying Heaven Down

Jonathan Edwards described heaven as a "world of love." Imagine a place where all those you meet love you perfectly and you love them perfectly. Where you love God completely. Where you know and understand His perfect love fully.

Now, imagine His Kingdom coming and His will being done on earth as it is in heaven. This is the prayer Jesus told us to pray. And it's the prayer this year that can help us love those we can't love on our own. It's the prayer that can change our nation. 🇺🇸



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