

A WOMEN'S MINISTRY RESOURCE *from*

TODAY'S CHRISTIAN

woman

and
gifted for
Leadership



Prayer and Meditation

Cultivating a deeper
relationship with God.



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How to Use this Women's Ministry Resource

Whether you lead a large women's group, a medium-sized Bible study, or a small weekly prayer group, this resource is designed for *you*. First, give every woman in your group a copy of the "For Participants" section that follows. (The price you paid for this download includes permission to make up to 1000 copies of this material for your local church's use.) Encourage everyone to read the articles and journal their thoughts in the "Prepare" spaces provided before your group meets.





Prayer and Meditation

How to Use this TCW Women's Ministry Resource

Following the articles, you'll find an "Explore" section that's meant for you to use as a discussion guide during your meeting time. These questions will help you dive deeper into the topic, but feel free to also create your own questions for your group. In addition, you may want to start each meeting by simply asking participants to share their own thoughts and reactions from the reading and journaling they did ahead of time.

At the end of the "For Participants" section is a series of seven "Live It" suggestions. These daily-life application steps take on a variety of forms, but each one is meant to help women grow closer to God and follow his lead in the context of their everyday life. Challenge all the women in your group to put these seven ideas into practice during the week that follows your meeting time.

Next you'll find a "For the Leader" section that's meant just for you. Here you'll get an extra "Interact" idea you can use with your group when you meet as well as a bonus "Connect" suggestion for how you can follow up on this topic in a way that helps deepen the relationships between the women in your group. Last you'll find a "Go Deeper" list of resources to help you—or the women in your group—explore this topic further on your own.

We hope that this TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN and GIFTED FOR LEADERSHIP resource is used by God as a powerful tool in your women's ministry group.



For Participants

Introduction

Connecting with God

By Marian V. Liautaud



Last year I went on a spiritual retreat during Holy Week. It was the first time in years I had set aside time to be still and know God. For four days, I was completely unplugged—no cell phone, no laptop. Except for the two or three short guided group conversations throughout each day, it was just me, my Bible, and my journal.

The first day I tried to quiet myself and get my brain into prayer mode. Instead, I fell asleep for several hours and woke up in time for dinner. After dinner, I tried again to focus on God. I read passages of Scripture, hoping to experience a moment of illumination—something, anything, to help me know for certain that God was with me. I tried writing my prayers in my journal.





This helped me stay focused, but still, divine revelation eluded me. I wanted a special kind of awakening. Weren't retreats supposed to lead to enlightenment and give my faith life a boost?

On Day Two my experience started to shift. The retreat paced between brief devotional readings, group discussion, and plenty of solitary time with God. During our discussion times, we explored the days leading up to Christ's crucifixion and death. When Jesus whispered, "I thirst" while he hung dying on the cross, I envisioned not only his physical need for water, but also his overwhelming need to quench all the sin of the world that keeps us from him.

The next day we worshiped together and then walked the perimeter of the sanctuary to view the art that highlighted Jesus' final days. A contemporary interpretation of *La Pieta* showed Mary cradling Jesus' dead body in her arms. As I stood before the painting pondering this mother's broken heart for her son, I felt the magnitude of her pain. I realized anew that my salvation had been bought for a price. This realization led me to deep repentance and reflection of whether I was living a life worthy of the price Christ had paid for me.

I share this example with you to illustrate the point of the following download: Prayer comes in many forms. There is no one right way to pray. In today's technology-driven culture, we have myriad ways to stay connected. So too with prayer.





For me, time to meditate and pray at this retreat helped unlock a spiritual creativity, which led to deeper, more honest communication with God. This kind of benchmark experience isn't the norm for me. Rather than waiting for an occasional breakthrough like this, I rely on regular conversation with God, especially while driving to and from work. Author Cheri Fuller offers up four additional ideas for incorporating prayer into your daily routine in her article, "The Busy Woman's Guide to Prayer" and Luis Palau examines the five answers God most commonly gives to our prayers.

Before your group meets, read through the articles in this download and take some time to journal your thoughts in the "Prepare" space provided. Then be ready to discuss the "Explore" questions with your group, inviting God to grow and challenge you through the process.

My hope is that you will gain some tools to guide you toward "praying without ceasing."

Grace,

Marian V. Liautaud

Contributing Editor, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN downloads



- ▶ Grab a pen or highlighter as you read the following articles and be sure to underline the parts that really stand out to you. To ready yourself for a discussion with the other women in your group, jot down notes and journal your thoughts in the "Prepare" section that follows each article.



The Power of Prayer

Here's what best-selling author Stormie Omartian wants you to know about.

By Ginger E. Kolbaba

Walk through any bookstore, and you're likely to run across one of author Stormie Omartian's runaway bestsellers—*The Power of a Praying Wife*, *The Power of a Praying Parent*, *The Power of a Praying Husband*, *The Power of a Praying Nation*, and *The Power of a Praying Woman* (all Harvest House), as well as *Praying God's Will for Your Life* (Thomas Nelson).





But what's amazing about Stormie is that she blushes when someone calls her an expert on prayer." A lot of people think because I've written books on prayer that I know something special. But you know what? The truth is, I'm just desperate for God," she insists. It's that desperation that seems to be the theme through Stormie's ... well, stormy... life.

Raised by a mentally ill mother who verbally and physically abused her, Stormie, spent her childhood locked in closets trying to avoid the rats that lurked there. She spent much of her teens and twenties searching for the love and acceptance she never received at home, which led to suicide attempts, heavy alcohol and drug use, and a failed marriage. Nothing helped her insecurity and pain—until a friend took her to church. There Stormie discovered the love and acceptance she'd longed for through a relationship with Jesus Christ. But calm still didn't enter Stormie's life. Although she met and married Michael, a fellow Christian, Michael's tendency toward verbal abuse brought back all the pain and insecurity of her childhood. Not until 15 years into their marriage did Stormie finally discover the secret to successful living: desperate prayer and total obedience to God.

It was prayer that helped her forgive her mother, strengthen her marriage, heal her insecurities, and learn parenting skills to raise her children: Chris, John David, and Amanda, all adults now. And it brought her through a year-long recovery after she nearly died from a burst appendix.





While other people might have turned to bitterness and anger, Stormie turned to God, who's shaped her into a gentle, genuinely lovely woman. "That's the Lord," claims Stormie. "He's spared me so many times. I found a way out of my suffering, and I want to share that with other people to let them know there's hope." Here's what Stormie had to say about the power of prayer.

When did you first realize prayer's power?

When I brought my first child, Chris, home from the hospital after he was born. Because of my mother's mental illness, I didn't have a positive role model for parenting. When Chris would cry and I couldn't get him to stop, I'd lose it and get angry. I realized that if someone didn't intervene, I could abuse him as my mother had me. That realization terrified me.

I prayed, "God, help me raise this child. I have no idea how to do it. I don't want to live with this horrible anger that makes me want to beat him to stop his crying." I'd put Chris in his crib, go in my room, and cry to God, "Lord, you've got to transform me because I can't change myself. But the Bible says you can. Heal me."

Every time I felt anger, I went to God in prayer. The more I prayed, the more God lifted it from me. By the time my daughter, Amanda, arrived, I didn't struggle with anger anymore.

Did prayer help you overcome your traumatic past?

Definitely. My journey from brokenness to wholeness didn't happen overnight; in fact, it took 14 years from the time I





began the process until I was able to help others with the same problems. When I was a new Christian, I thought once you received Jesus into your life, that was it—no more problems. The truth is, while I'd secured eternal life, my life here on earth still needed work!

But my best friend since high school came to Christ the same year I did, and we started attending the same church. Because we had similarly dysfunctional families, we understood each other's prayer needs. We began praying regularly together over the phone several times a week. Through each low time of discouragement, each difficult decision, our prayers for each other were instrumental in our spiritual growth and emotional healing.

As I matured in my faith, I knew I wanted to forgive my mother. I learned, however, that unforgiveness as deeply rooted as mine must be unraveled one layer at a time. Whenever I'd feel any anger, hatred, and unforgiveness toward her, I had to learn to take charge of my will and deliberately pray, "Lord, my desire is to forgive my mother. Help me to forgive her completely."

Over several years of doing this more often than I can count, I suddenly realized I no longer hated her; I felt sorry for her instead. Being in touch with the heart of God through prayer for my mother brought such forgiveness in me that when she died a few years later, I had absolutely no bad feelings toward her.





How did you learn to pray so effectively?

It was because I was desperate for God—for his help in overcoming the scars of my past. Every time I read something in the Bible about prayer, I did what it said. For example, the apostle James says we don't have because we don't ask (4:2), so I thought, *I might as well go ahead and ask!* But James 4:3 adds, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives...." I realized I have to be obedient to God if I expect him to answer.

Is praying specific prayers important?

I think it is. There's nothing wrong with telling God what *you* want, but you've always got to pray, "God, more than anything else, I want what you want."

I try to be honest with God about how I feel, what I need, what I long for and don't have. But first I go to God in confession to make sure my attitude's right. For example, if I harbor unforgiveness toward my husband, it puts up a wall between God and me. Only confession clears the channel between us and God.

What if a woman feels her prayers don't sound "good enough"?

Oh, I feel that way, too. I've often thought, *I'm nobody. Why would God answer my prayers?* But thank God he's not impressed by eloquence; he's impressed by our longing for him.





How do we get that longing?

Everybody has longings—for a husband, a child, a close companionship, a better job, a bigger house. However, most of the time what we're really longing for is God's presence in our life. We just misinterpret the longings.

For instance, nine years ago my family and I moved to Tennessee. Michael was working long hours, and my kids, who were in junior high and high school, didn't need me as they used to. I was alone most of the time and so lonely.

Finally I couldn't take it anymore. I burst into tears and prayed, "God, this feeling in me hurts. Take away this loneliness." Suddenly, I felt his presence so strong in my heart that the loneliness lifted. God helped me recognize my loneliness as a call to be with him. So every time I felt lonely after that, I'd pray, "Lord, I'm lonely for more of you."

But what about when God doesn't seem to answer?

I have a family member for whose salvation I pray—a wonderful person who's closed off to the gospel. When I think of this person's background, I understand the reasons. But I wonder, *Lord, I've been praying for this person to come to you for 25 years. How much longer do I have to pray for this?* But I can't stop praying, even though I don't see an answer.

Sometimes I think God allows things to go on and on so our roots grow strong in him. It requires us to lay down our desires and say, "Not my will, God, but yours be done."





When we're burdened about something, God either will change the situation—or our heart.

For many years, it never occurred to me to pray anything more than "protect Michael" kind of prayers. But Michael brought anger into our marriage. Whenever he was upset about something, he'd lash out at me and the kids. After 15 years of marriage, the verbal abuse got so bad, I couldn't take it anymore; I wanted out. I had no option but to pray a desperate prayer: "God, this situation's killing me. Everything in me wants to take the kids and leave."

After one particularly rough week, Michael went on a business trip and my kids spent the weekend with some friends. The empty house only magnified how empty I felt. So I told God, "I need answers. I'm not eating until I hear something from you." I stayed in my bed, read my Bible, prayed, journaled, and fasted.

Why did you fast?

The Bible's filled with references to prayer and fasting as the way to receive God's wisdom and power. I knew if I wanted to see a breakthrough, fasting was the way to do it.

So it's going to the next level?

Yes. It's about putting God first. Every time I felt a hunger pang, I'd pray about my marriage. I'm sure God had been speaking to me about my marriage for years, but it wasn't until I began to fast that I really heard him.





And what did he tell you?

That instead of praying, "God, make Michael more this, less that," I was to pray, "God, change me to become the person you want me to be—and change Michael to become the person you want him to be."

That doesn't seem fair!

You're right. It was the hardest thing I've ever done. It took me several hours just to come to the point of saying, "Okay, God, I'll stay in the marriage and do things your way." I sobbed. I felt as though I was dying inside. But I stayed—with no guarantee our life together would change. I didn't start praying that way for Michael because I felt like it, but because I wanted to obey God.

Did you ever think, Why am I the one who has to pray?

Oh, I asked that many times. That's when God would say, "I'll work with whomever is willing. You're willing—you start."

What do you say to the woman who no longer feels anything for her husband?

I've been there. At one point, I told my husband I didn't love him anymore. I didn't say that to hurt him; I said that to let him know how badly he'd hurt me. I didn't feel anything, not love, not tenderness. But God restored that.

Are you saying God can resurrect a marriage?

Yes, he can. I've seen it. I've gotten so many letters from women who've said they were separated or divorced, but when they started to pray, their marriage was restored. Some of these stories are astounding.





Only our God is a God who transforms us from the inside out. All you have to say is, "God, I'm willing to open my heart to you."

But that's no guarantee prayer will transform a "D" marriage into an "A" marriage.

Right. You're still dealing with individuals who have free will. It always takes two people. If a husband's so strong-willed he won't change, God won't violate a spouse's free will.

What about the married woman who suffers physical abuse?

I have zero tolerance for that. I don't advise a woman to stay and pray; I tell her to get out and get counseling. Pray from afar. The Lord *never* condones physical abuse.

What other advice do you have on prayer?

I challenge women to think, *What could I accomplish today if I allowed God to work through me? What would I like to see?* Think of something you want to do beyond what you can do, and pray for that.

So you're advocating praying big prayers.

Yes. Too often we underestimate prayer's power. When you realize that power, you realize you can't afford *not* to pray. The more you have to do, the more time you should spend praying. And that, in turn, blesses what you're doing.

Some day, when we get to heaven, I hope we'll see all the ways God answered our prayers even when we didn't know about it! That's why I really want to encourage women to pray. Sometimes it feels as though our prayers aren't heard,



The Busy Woman's Guide to Prayer

(No matter how packed your daily planner is!)

By Cheri Fuller



Like Martha in the Bible, I have lots to do—office work, writing projects, laundry, cooking, cleaning. Just this week, for instance, I had a deadline to meet, my daughter-in-law was hospitalized, and I cared for her baby. Add in meals to cook, a household to run, a prayer group to lead, and preparation for an overseas ministry trip. It's a real challenge to squeeze in time for prayer!

I used to think, *If I don't pray at a certain time of day, then my prayers don't really count.* Then my prayer life underwent a radical transformation. I discovered the apostle Paul's command to "pray continually"





(1 Thessalonians 5:17) means more than just spending a lot of time in prayer; it means sharing a continual dialogue with God *wherever I go*.

The truth that God listens to my prayers wherever I am didn't sink in until my son, Chris, left to attend a university 20 hours from home. Oh, how I missed hearing his voice! Busy with premed classes, intramural basketball, and studying, Chris didn't call often. But once in a while, the phone would ring, and it would be Chris. I'd drop everything—the project I was working on, dinner preparations—just to hear my son's voice.

One day I realized God feels the same way about me, only hundreds of times more, because I'm *his* child (**John 1:12**)! Whether I'm walking, driving across town, or sending a prayer heavenward from my computer, he delights in hearing from me—not just once a day, but *throughout* the day. Scripture says he "inclines his ear" and is "open to hear" my prayers (**Psalms 40:1 34:15**).

I became even more excited about the effects of praying continuously when I noticed that throughout the Bible, God used short prayers to accomplish great things—such as raising the dead or parting the Red Sea. It dawned on me that thoughts such as, *But I can't pray long enough*, or *If I can't pray one hour, then why pray?* have no biblical basis. It's wonderful to have longer sessions of prayer when I can, but remembering that my short prayers can have a big impact encourages me to pray throughout the day.





Whether you're married or single, with or without children, you probably struggle with your prayer life as I did with mine. The good news is you don't have to put either life or prayer on hold. Here's how to begin building a 24/7 prayer life.

Get a Good Start

For me, a life of continuous prayer now starts even before I lift my head off the pillow. I say, "Lord, this is the day you've made; help me focus on you in the midst of all I've got to do."

I read God's Word before the demands of the day flood in, because Scripture never fails to draw me into prayer and praise. Praying things such as "Lord, help me to trust in you with all my heart and not lean on my own understanding" (from **Proverbs 3:5–6**), or "Thank you, Father, that you are compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love" (from **Psalms 103:8**), helps me zero in on the Mountain Mover instead of the mountains I may be facing. And most days I pray these and other prayers for my family and friends during my morning walk.

My friend Betsy also starts her day with prayer and exercise. Betsy—who's active in her church's women's ministry, leads a neighborhood Bible study, and serves on various committees and boards—still finds time to pray faithfully for many people and concerns while walking 30 minutes on her treadmill. For example, Betsy prayed for me to experience energy and strength while I spoke at her church's retreat—and I did! I know that Betsy's "treadmill prayers" are effective because I've personally experienced God's answers to them.





Clue into Visual Reminders

I use the things around me as visual cues to prompt me to pray. For example, as I pass the windows of neighbors' houses on my morning walk, I pray, "God, let your light shine in; bless them and draw them closer so they'll know you." As I shower after walking, I pray, "Lord, please create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me; cleanse my heart of sin" (from Psalm 51:10). When I drive past a school and see a school-zone sign, I make the area a "prayer zone" by asking God to protect the students and to give all the teachers wisdom.

Later, as I bake bread or cook a meal, I'm reminded to pray that Christ would be the Bread of Life for the person receiving it. Picking up a loved one's shoes triggers me to pray that his feet will stay on God's path. Seeing something lovely—a mallard duck flying through the sky or fresh blooms on a rose bush—reminds me to say a prayer of thanks to God for his creation.

My friend Peggy also likes using visual cues. When she puts on her seat belt before heading to the high school to substitute teach, she says, "Lord, I want to abide in you and be yoked with you." When she stops at a stop sign, she takes a deep breath and says, "My rest is in you alone, Lord. I may be trying to get somewhere, but thank you that you are preparing the way."

With visual cues to prompt us, all our daily activities—gardening, cleaning, working, or creating—become springboards to conversation with God.





Use Tools to Stay Focused

It's easy for my mind to wander during prayer. One way I counteract this is by using the acronym B-L-E-S-S as I pray for my family and friends. Each letter in the acronym stands for a key area of life: Body, Labor, Emotional, Social, and Spiritual.

For example, for our son, Chris, who's now a Navy doctor, I prayed today: "Lord, bless Chris's *body*; strengthen and protect him during his deployment. Bless Chris's *labor*; give him wisdom as he cares for the Marines' medical needs and injuries. Bless Chris's *emotional* life; help him trust you concerning his and his wife Maggie's move to Hawaii. Father, bless Chris's *social* relationships; bring him a Christian friend on the ship while he's deployed. And bless Chris's *spiritual* life; help him draw nearer to you and your Word each day."

Dena, a busy mother of four, always felt guilty about not praying more often. She needed a way to focus her attention during the snippets of time she found herself alone. So one day she wrote down every prayer request she could think of—for herself, family, friends, church, community, nation, and world. Then she divided them into 31 equal segments and put them in a notebook. She keeps the notebook in her bathroom, one of the only places she has a few minutes alone. Each day she prays over the few items that correspond to the day of the month. Dena's notebook helps her focus on each of the many needs in her world—one day, one minute at a time.





Pray on the Spot

With all I've got going on, I don't want to forget to pray for others' struggles. So instead of saving those prayers for a special prayer time, I pray right on the spot. If a friend asks me to pray for a specific need, I offer to pray with her right then. If a speeding ambulance passes me while I'm driving, I immediately pray for the people in it and for the doctors who'll care for the injured people at the hospital.

Connie, a busy mom, Bible teacher, and Christian psychotherapist, finds time to pray for the many people she sees each day by praying on the spot, too. At the end of each counseling session, Connie takes a few moments to pray with her client. She then pauses to ask God that he would give her wisdom and discernment to help the next patient before he or she arrives (**Psalm 119:66**). Connie also prays the same prayer for the patients she sees heading into nearby medical offices.

"Even in the midst of my busy days, God gives me 'mini-moments' to lift those around me in prayer," says Connie. "Everyone we come in contact with daily is struggling with something. It may be their job, their marriage, an illness, or stress. Everyone needs our prayers."

I'm still a Martha by nature, but I've found praying continually isn't just another duty or heavy burden to bear. Prayer is how I know God, not just know about him; it's how I hear God, not just hear about him. Time after time, when I pour out my burdens, concerns, and problems, I experience his peace and hope. I see his faithfulness more clearly. I experience his comfort in trials, his unfailing love as I see him provide for needs about which I've prayed.



Prayers That Move the Heart of God

How to cultivate a meaningful conversation with the Lord.

By Nancy Guthrie



My teenaged son, Matt, always has a great time when he visits my parents. And why shouldn't he? Matt gets out of bed whenever he wants, eats whatever he wants, and watches whatever he wants on TV. In fact, Matt made a grand discovery at Grandma's house during his last visit. My mother keeps a bucket of chocolate-chip cookie dough in her refrigerator that Matt enjoyed eating by the spoonful! When he returned from that visit, he began asking me to buy cookie dough from Sam's Club, just like my mom.





I know having cookie dough easily available isn't good for either of us, so I said "no" over and over ... until last week. Matt's repeated requests finally wore me down.

That's one of the big differences between God's parenting and mine. God doesn't give me everything I repeatedly ask for when he knows it's not best for me. But a shallow reading of Luke 11:9–10 could lead me to think otherwise. There Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

Is the way to get what I want from God through wearing him down, or getting as many people as possible to ask God for it? What kinds of prayer *really* move the heart and hand of God?

Secret-Formula Prayer vs. Seeking Prayer

As his parent, I don't want Matt to try to get what he wants by constantly begging me for it or getting everyone he knows to gang up on me. I want to hear his heart on the matter, and I want him to hear mine. I want us to have a conversation. Isn't that how it is with our heavenly Father? Prayer is about a *conversation* with our loving God—not about wearing him down to get what we want.

There's so much to want—healed bodies, restored relationships, changed circumstances. But asking, seeking, and knocking aren't secret formulas for getting what we want *from* God; they're ways to get more *of* God. As I listen to God speak to me through his Word, he gives me more of himself in fuller, newer ways. Then, if healing





doesn't come, if the relationship remains broken, or if the pressures increase, I have the opportunity to discover for myself he is enough. His presence is enough. His purpose is enough.

If you truly want to move God's heart, put aside secret-formula prayer and instead begin to practice prayer that seeks the Giver more than the gifts.

Prayer is changing me from someone who knew a lot about God into someone who's experiencing God in deep, though sometimes difficult, ways.

Superficial Prayer vs. Significant Prayer

Sometimes I catch myself "chatting" with God, limiting my prayers to superficial things and surface issues, never getting to the heart of the matter. And I've noticed that when others offer prayer requests, they're rarely about spiritual needs. We ask God to heal physical ailments, provide safe travel, and to "be with us."

Of course God cares about these things. But prayer is spiritual work toward a spiritual end. God wants to rub off our rough edges and clean up our character. So why do we settle for talking to him only about the superficial stuff? When our prayers move from the superficial to the significant, we invite God to do no less than a deep, transforming, igniting work in our life and in the lives of those for whom we're praying.

I've often found myself slipping into superficial mode in my prayers for Matt—asking God to keep him safe or to bless his day at school. But I really don't want to settle for those





things. So my prayers have moved from the superficial to the significant. I'm asking God to shape Matt's character—even if it requires some struggle. I'm begging the Holy Spirit to ignite in Matt a passion for holiness and a love for God's Word. These are things that really matter. This is what significant prayer is all about.

Showy Prayer vs. Secret Prayer

Several years ago, at a friend's wedding, a college friend described me to her other friends as "a prayer warrior." Her comment surprised me because I knew it wasn't true. I guess I'd made a great impression with my public prayers at our weekly Bible study group in college. But the truth was, there wasn't much private prayer going on in my life.

If I'm not careful, I still can make prayer all about impressing others with my pseudo-spirituality. That's "showy prayer"—prayer that's more for others' ears than for God's. Jesus warned against this: "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the doors and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:5-6).

Showy prayer uses put-on voices, lofty words, and spiritual-sounding phrases; simple prayer is authentic and humble. I can perform public prayers or make claims of private prayer, and settle for the applause of people; or I can go to a secret place, shut the door, and commune with God. It's in that secret place with him you and I find our





most blessed reward—not impressing others, but cultivating true intimacy with him.

Insistent Prayer vs. Submissive Prayer

Nothing's taught me more about prayer than Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. According to Hebrews 5:7–8, "during the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered."

This moves me, because I know what it's like to offer prayers with loud cries and tears, to come before God with a broken heart and a desperate need. Several years ago, physicians told my husband and me that because of a rare metabolic disorder, our newborn daughter, Hope, would live for only two or three months.

Time seemed to be slipping away so quickly when one day, as I rocked Hope in the nursery we'd prepared for her—tears spilling down my face—I thought, *I'll ask God to give Hope more time*. It seemed such a modest prayer; I'd already surrendered any insistence God heal her completely. But even as that prayer formed in my mind, I sensed God calling me to submit to his perfect timing. So my prayer instead became, *Give me strength to make the most of every day you give me with Hope. Show me how to rest in your plan for her life and mine*.

In Hope's life and death, I learned what it is to pray to a God who has the power to make another way ... but chooses





not to. It helps to know Jesus understands what this feels like. Like Jesus, I've wrestled with God's plan for my life even as I've sought to submit to it. But Jesus shows me how to obey when God's answer to my sincere, reverent prayer is "no." I also see Jesus' example of obedience.

I've learned that submissive prayer is prayer that welcomes God to work in and through my suffering rather than begs him to take it away. It's thanking God for what he gives me rather than resenting him for what I lose. Submissive prayer is changing me from someone who knew a lot about God into someone who's experiencing God in deep, though sometimes difficult, ways.

Too often I still find myself merely going through the motions of prayer, but I want to pray in a way that's authentic, sincere, and effective. I'm learning to go to my heavenly Father in the way I want my son to come to me. I want to hear what Matt wants and needs. I want to respond. I want to be active in his life, doing what I know is best for him.

Our heavenly Father's no different. He has no need for a show or secret formulas, and he's not interested in keeping things superficial. He loves it when we come to him—and he simply wants to talk with us.

Nancy Guthrie is the author of Holding On to Hope: A Pathway Through Suffering to the Heart of God and The One Year Book of Hope (both Tyndale). She lives in Tennessee. This article first appeared in TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine, 2006.





Mary Heart, Martha Brain

How can I focus on one thing—prayer—when so many things need to be done?

By Kathy Callahan-Howell

I used to picture myself as Mary, sitting in my living room and listening to my guest's heartaches while Martha mashed potatoes in the kitchen. *I always choose Mary's stillness over Martha's work*, I thought.

I was wrong.

I left home early one Sunday morning to prepare my heart for worship and preaching. I entered the empty sanctuary, sat in the quiet, and tried to focus on Christ. The minutes ticked by and I remembered I hadn't plugged in the coffeepot.





That can wait, I told myself, and I directed my thoughts back to Jesus.

Another minute passed. Then I wondered, *Are the transparencies for the overhead projector ready? And what about the banner—did anyone remember to change it? And someone really ought to plug in that coffeepot.*

Reality struck. I was Martha—concerned about many things, and not about the one thing that was truly needed.

I had written a book on spiritual disciplines and was serving as the prayer editor of my denomination's magazine, but after my Sunday morning frenzy, I realized my inner life needed some work. I had a sabbatical planned for the following summer, and I determined to use that time to develop my prayer life.

I planned a series of retreats and made a long list of books I wanted to read. I planned to visit 17 churches, sometimes more than one per Sunday. One way or another, this Martha was *going* to learn how to be Mary.

From that sabbatical, I developed three paradigms for prayer and meditation—centering prayer, temperament-targeted meditation, and a reflection tool called *lectio divina*. I have incorporated these methods into my prayer life.

Together they have instigated a shift in my spirit from distracted busyness to focused devotion.





Centering on prayer

My first attempts at reforming my prayer life began the way many of us begin—I tried praying more. I read two books that convicted me to increase my prayer time.

But is time really the issue? The question resembles the old parenting issue, quality versus quantity time. We long for quality time with children and for quality time with God, but both prove difficult without enough quantity. Like throwing a rock in the pond and waiting for the ripples to settle, it takes some time to settle ourselves and be still before God.

Rising earlier and taking more time, however, only provided part of my answer. I still found myself distracted. A pastor friend gave me a book on intimate prayer that addressed this very issue. This book instructed me to just stop thinking: if thoughts distracted me from listening to God, I should tell my brain to stop it. He made it sound simple, so I tried it. I told my mind to stop thinking.

I might as well have told my lungs to stop breathing.

Why couldn't I do what the author asked? My husband Roger can. I, however, am the consummate multi-tasker. My mind readily juggles family, church, and personal commitments. I know God made my brain this way so I can fulfill my roles as pastor, wife, and mother. But what about prayer? Surely there must be some way to pray with my Martha brain.

Then I discovered a wonderful book, *Concerning the Inner Life* by Evelyn Underhill. She liberated my approach





of adoration. Underhill said, "Persons whose natural expression is verbal, and who need the support of concrete image, make violent efforts to 'go into the silence' because some wretched little book has told them to do so."

That was it! I needed to throw that wretched little book in the trash (well, return it to my friend) and try something else! That technique worked for others, but it didn't work for me. I needed to find another way to center my mind.

The first retreat of my sabbatical summer provided an answer. I submitted myself to the tutelage of a nun, learning about meditative prayer at the quiet confines of a convent. I spent three days learning from a 14th-century volume written by an anonymous monk about "centering prayer." A modern Trappist monk, Thomas Keating, also teaches this method in his book, *Open Mind, Open Heart*.

The goal of centering prayer is to enter totally into God's presence, discovering communion with him through focusing our attention on him alone. Proponents suggest this practice creates a deeper settledness within us and a greater awareness of God.

Instead of an angry or irritated reaction to unwanted, distracting thoughts, centering prayer teaches us to take a sacred word and gently brush the pesky thoughts away. Since frustration would be as much of a distraction as the original thought, Keating teaches us to think of the sacred word as a feather brushing away a piece of cotton.

There's nothing magical about the sacred word itself. Each person chooses their own word that resonates within





without carrying intense distracting emotions. The word must be simple, and usually one syllable. Commonly used words include *God, Jesus, love, peace, and trust.*

Yes became my first sacred word. I chose it because it implies submission to whatever God has for me, yet I don't find it emotionally laden. When I was practicing centering prayer and distracting thoughts came along, I simply thought to myself, *Yes.*

Centering prayer has made quieting my spirit easier. Last week my day started with an angry phone call. Rather than moving on and carrying that anger with me, I sat in my prayer chair and took several minutes to refocus. Brushing away nagging and bitter thoughts with a humbly obedient "yes" calmed my mind to find its peace in God.

Taking time for centering prayer enabled me to begin the day at rest, rather than stewing in anger.

Four meditation temperaments

Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him. She found that one needed thing. Good for her. But is it right to expect Martha to sit on her hands and listen while the bread is burning?

I know God created Martha and me to be complex and multi-tasking individuals. Is there a way to sit at Jesus' feet that works with, and not against, the personality and temperament God gave me?





That question led me to select Chester Michael and Marie Norrisey's book *Prayer and Temperament* for my sabbatical reading list. In it I found four forms of prayer and meditation. Each form is designed to accommodate one of four temperaments (based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator).

• *The first meditation style, designed for “intuitive feelers” like myself, stresses creative exercises involving imagination, imagery, and journaling.*

One exercise is addressing Scripture passages to yourself. To bring this to life, just insert your name into a passage and meditate on it with the personal application. For example, Jesus says, "Come to me, Kathy, and I will give you rest." Stirring the heart with the recognition that the promises and commands of Scripture are meant for me personally opens a depth of feeling that is too often buried under the busywork of ministry.

A related technique employs imagery to release emotions as we interact with God. Some people like to use artwork depicting biblical scenes to help imagine the power, the love, or the beauty of God. Others pick up on the depth of feeling found in the colors and images of other forms of art.

I remember a painting entitled "Grace" on the cover of a Christian magazine. It depicted a free flowing image in shades of blue and white. In the swirl of cool motion, a human figure was being lifted up by the waves of color. As I meditated on the painting, its imagery gave me a sense of being buoyed by grace, of being lifted up by the hands of God.





• *Scientifically minded folks, labeled “intuitive thinkers,” may benefit from taking a Scripture passage and asking basic investigative questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how.* Going beyond those questions, you may ask yourself, “What area of my life will this help with?” This investigative type of meditation can help draw us into truth and discover how it applies to our lives.

• *For those driven by duty, “sensory judges,” a concrete, orderly system of meditation appeals to the spirit more than abstract notions of peace, grace, and joy.* Using the senses to see, hear, and smell the scenes of Scripture as though actually there brings ancient truth to modern application.

During Holy Week this year, I used this form of meditation to focus on Christ's passion. I imagined the two thieves and Jesus with a sign over his head, “King of the Jews.” I imagined the jeers of the crowd, the weight of sin, and the sting of sweat and blood. Then I imagined a sign over my head saying “Beloved Child of God,” and I realized anew how much it cost him to give me that title.

• *The fourth form of meditation engages action in prayer.* Fishing, hiking, and swimming can all be meditation-enhancing activities. And while outdoor enthusiasts may enjoy this kind of prayer, the key for “sensory perceivers” is not just being outside, but moving and working while they pray. Like Brother Lawrence, my friend Kim likes to pray while washing the dishes. What a Martha way to be Mary! Do the work and sit at Jesus' feet at the same time!





Michael and Norrissey explain that regardless of which style you prefer, people benefit by occasionally using prayer styles preferred by other types. It adds variety and breadth to our relationship with God.

A change of place

My husband Roger and I have taken years to develop familiar patterns of communication. Those patterns suit our relationship and enable us to function smoothly on a daily basis. We can, however, grow overly familiar with and unresponsive to the same old messages. So when I break the norm by writing Roger a love letter, my words make a deeper impact—on Roger and on me—than my usual "I love you."

The same is true of our prayer lives. When we use our usual prayer pattern, we find a comfortable and efficient way to spend time with God. That is good. And that is what is needed most of the time, especially when we are weary. But occasionally, if we try communicating with God in a different way, he opens a fresh understanding of himself.

The last of my three retreats during the sabbatical was spent at a friend's house in rural Kentucky, far away from anyone and everyone. Though the first of the four meditation styles is best suited for me, I decided to attempt the fourth—active, nature-appreciating prayer. Hiking seems a strange form of prayer to me, but I spent days in the open fields and forested glens of Kentucky trying to hear God through his creation.

One prayer suggestion asked me to find two trees: one that represented me now, and one that I would like to be. I





ventured out to a grove of walnut trees to try the exercise. Within that grove, I journaled (my fallback prayer form) several lessons from the trees.

The grove was planted by a man who, at 60 years of age, would never harvest the wood. He planted the trees for those who came after him. He could have harvested walnuts if he wanted, but as the young trees grew, he pruned off the lower branches to force the trees to grow upward and straight. One day, not only walnuts, but solid, straight lumber would be harvested from this grove. Pruning the trees when they're young doesn't hurt them, but enables them to grow straight. Waiting to cut a tree until it's older, however, is more painful to the tree, leaving scars that mar the wood's quality.

I still mull the lessons learned in that grove, but on that particular day, God had a specific lesson in mind for me. Two trees stood in contrast to one another. One was tall and straight, a pillar that extended to the sky. Great lumber would come from that tree. Another was thick and strong at the base, but its limbs branched in several directions, and each branch distracted the tree from its upward course.

I realized that the straight tree was what I wanted to be. But my life was better characterized by the second, distracted from my goal by moving in too many directions. This exercise outside my characteristic form enabled me to hear God in a fresh way, directing my life to be more focused on him.

Finding the fullness of the Word

Perhaps the method I learned during my sabbatical that





had the greatest impact on my everyday prayer life was the ancient *lectio divina*. The name means "divine reading." This form of meditation is designed to deepen Bible reading, though other books may be used.

This guide has four steps. Each step, interestingly, correlates to one of the four temperament meditations discussed above. By using all the steps, the pray-er can both enjoy his or her natural expressions and exercise weak spiritual muscles to greater strength.

- The first step is called *lectio*, or reading. *Lectio* is preferably done aloud. Sometimes I tape myself reading and then play it back, so I can truly listen. The different inflections and emphases within my voice can be indicators of hidden or unrealized attitudes about the truths contained in the passage.
- The second step is *meditatio*, trying to imagine the scene described by the passage. When I read about Jesus clearing the Temple, for example, I imagined the bleating of sheep and cooing of doves. Then I asked, "How does this relate to me?" As I pictured the determination it would have taken for Christ to wrestle his way through the crowd of objectors, I asked, "Do I have the kind of zeal Jesus demonstrated?"
- The third step is *oratio*, or responding. After reflecting on what God is communicating, I, in turn, respond to him. Recognizing I was lacking the zeal of Christ to wrestle through obstacles, I prayed that God would light his fire underneath my zeal.





- The final step is *contemplatio*, or resting. This simple step is often the most difficult for the Martha-minded. *Contemplatio* means resting in God's presence—without words, without agenda, simply sitting with God, much like centering prayer.

When I meditated on the passage where Jesus storms the temple, I focused on the word "zeal" and even chose during that time of contemplation to make it my centering prayer sacred word.

Opening my ears

The fruit of deepened prayer shows in my professional and personal life. It deepens my understanding of Scripture, which deepens my preaching. I don't purposefully use *lectio divina* to explore sermon texts, but often something I have been meditating on fits perfectly with what I need to share with my congregation.

Sitting at the feet of Christ has deepened my love for him. My heart began to break over what breaks the heart of God. I discovered a fresh and moving compassion for the lost, because I knew how much it pains God's heart.

Best of all, my hearing has improved. For years I bemoaned the fact that God didn't seem to talk to me much. I realize now that a Martha brain is often so diverted by today's to-do list that it doesn't hear the gentle whisperings of God. In fact, my Martha brain fought against God's intrusion into its plans.

Developing Mary's heart, on the other hand, has taught me to listen for and obey God's agenda, instead of following Martha's.





One Thursday morning I had a few moments before leaving for an early meeting. I was glad to see an email from my friend Rayna, for she had been out of touch for a couple of weeks. She asked a question about an upcoming date and apologized because her mind hadn't been functioning well lately. I wondered what she meant by that. I couldn't really explain it, but I felt compelled to check on her.

My inner Martha had already planned to go to the meeting and then do some shopping. There were some things I needed to pick up, and I had just enough time to cover the bases before the rest of my schedule stacked up. But when I left the meeting to do my shopping, I could only think about visiting Rayna. The sense was so strong, I pushed Martha's agenda aside and went to Rayna's house.

When Rayna came to the door, she looked distressed, her clothing disheveled. She asked, "Why did you come; how did you know?"

How did I know what? I wondered. I stood there confused, having no clear reason for why I dropped by.

Then she burst out with the admission that she had just been trying to harm herself. Rayna's husband was out of town, her other close friend was out of the country, and her therapist was booked for the day. God had sent me at just the right moment. Besides the immediate rescue from that dangerous situation, the fact that God would act in such a clear way communicated a message of deep love to Rayna.

I had heard my marching orders for that moment. In the past, Martha's agenda would likely have overruled the very



Five Ways God Answers Prayer



Whatever the answer, your best interest is always in mind.

By Luis Palau

Over the years, I've discovered from Scripture and experience that God loves to answer our prayers. Here are five of his most frequent answers:

"No, I love you too much."

The Lord of the universe isn't under obligation to say "yes" to every prayer. That's a good thing, considering some of the things we request!

But sometimes God says "no" to our most heartfelt requests. Have you discovered this to be true in your own life? I certainly have. When my friend Diane started losing her hearing. When my mother-in-law came down with polio. When my nephew contracted AIDS.





I would be known as Luis Palau Jr. if it weren't for the fact that God said "no" to my most earnest childhood prayers. Shortly after my tenth birthday, my father, Luis Palau Sr., contracted bronchial pneumonia and died ten days later.

Death became, to me, the most undeniable reality under heaven. Everything else can be rationalized and wondered about and discussed, but death is there, staring you in the face. It happens. Even to the godliest people. No matter how hard we pray. Why? Because we still live in a fallen world.

I've been reminded of this repeatedly since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America. Tens of thousands of lives were spared. But God said "no" to the prayers of thousands of others. Will good come of their deaths? I believe so.

Without a doubt, the death of my father has had more impact on my ministry than anything else in my entire life, besides my own conversion to Jesus Christ. My wish and desire is that people get right with God, settle the big question, and die knowing—like my father—that they will be with Jesus, "which is better by far" (**Phil. 1:23**).

Does that mean we shouldn't bother to pray? Just the opposite. Over the years, traveling throughout the world, I've discovered four other ways God frequently answers prayer. Believe me, he loves to say "yes!"

"Yes, but you'll have to wait."

Immediate answers to prayer: You want them. I want them. But God simply does not always work that way. And to get his best, we must be patient. In some cases, we must wait





until the stroke of midnight for his answer to come. Phil Callaway didn't know what to say when his young children asked if Mommy was going to die. His wife, Ramona, suffered horrible seizures.

Hundreds of friends and relatives prayed, but Ramona's weight eventually slipped to 90 pounds. Medical specialists tried everything, but by the fall of 1996, the seizures were occurring daily, sometimes hourly.

Phil rarely left Ramona's side. He wondered if she would even make it to her 30th birthday. One evening, when things looked utterly hopeless, Phil paced their dark backyard, then fell to his knees. "God!" he cried out. "I can't take it anymore. Please do something!"

Suddenly a doctor's name came to mind. Phil called the doctor, who saw Ramona the next morning and diagnosed a rare chemical deficiency.

Within a week, Ramona's seizures ended. Her eyes sparkled again. The miracle was so incredible Phil says, "God gave me back my wife."

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (**Matt. 7:7**).

"Yes, but not what you expected."

Have you ever asked God to use you? If so, expect the unexpected!

National Football League running back Sherman Smith, the "Sherman Tank," stood six feet four inches tall and packed





225 pounds of the most solid muscle you'd ever want to tackle. His reputation for bowling over defensive linemen raised his celebrity to near-cult status in the Pacific Northwest, where he played for the Seattle Seahawks.

Then, without warning, the Seahawks traded their most popular player to the San Diego Chargers. Everything changed overnight for this running back, whose Christian faith was as rock solid as his abs. He wasn't with the Chargers for more than a few weeks when he seriously injured his knee. While in rehabilitation, he wondered, Lord, why did you ship me to San Diego?

But while his knee mended, Sherman had the opportunity to lead one of his teammates to the Lord. That converted party guy, Miles McPherson, has since become an outstanding youth evangelist who reaches tens of thousands of people each year.

Why was Sherman traded to San Diego? God wanted to use him, all right!

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (**Prov. 3:5–6**).

"Yes, and here's more!"

Ever wonder if the Lord really knows what you want and need?

Australian David Smallbone felt God leading him to promote Christian concerts in his homeland where only five percent of the people believed in Christ. When too few fans





filled seats during one major tour, however, David took a \$250,000 bath in red ink.

Creditors repossessed his home, and the father of six looked for work elsewhere. A top artist offered him a job in Nashville, so the Smallbones sold their furniture and other possessions and purchased tickets to the United States.

A few weeks after they arrived, however, David was informed that his position was "no longer available." He literally could not get out of bed for several days. When he and his wife explained to their children what happened, they all got on their knees and asked God to help them.

Interesting things began to happen. God provided bags of groceries, a minivan, and odd jobs. Then the biggest surprise of all—a recording contract for David's oldest daughter, Rebecca, age 15. She recorded her first album using an old family name, St. James.

Flash forward to today. David promotes his own daughter's sold-out concerts. Rebecca St. James has become one of the hottest Christian artists in America. CHRISTIANITY TODAY magazine named her one of the top 50 up-and-coming evangelical leaders under age 40. We love asking her to sing at our evangelistic festivals around the country.

All along—no surprise—God knew what he was doing!

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer. 29:11).





“Yes, I thought you’d never ask.”

Many people think prayer is complicated. Actually, the simplest prayer can bring you the miracle you need, when you need it.

After a serious fall, an older gentleman named Luke Mulder prayed to receive Jesus Christ. He then prayed for his wife, Clara, who was visiting her sister in California. That very same day Clara heard a gospel presentation and trusted Christ.

Christian cartoonist Ron Wheeler dreamed of creating evangelistic tracts, but he needed a new computer. He found out what he needed and started to pray. Two weeks later, a friend called Ron out of the blue and offered him a new computer—the exact model Ron had been praying about. Shortly after setting up the computer, Ron received a phone call from American Tract Society asking him to design a whole series of evangelistic cartoon tracts.

My friends Esteban and Carmela Tosoni were driving one of the highest mountain passes in the world when their car broke down. They were 20 miles from the nearest town. The Tosoni family prayed for God to send help. When they opened their eyes, a mechanic appeared out of nowhere, asked if he could help, fixed their gas filter, then departed.

Coincidences? Hardly!

**“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective”
(James. 5:16)**

Luis Palau is a world-renowned evangelist, radio broadcaster, and author of It's a God Thing, Where Is God When Bad Things Happen?, and God Is Relevant (Doubleday). This article first appeared in TODAY'S CHRISTIAN magazine, 2004.





Explore

Use these discussion questions to explore evangelism further with the women in your group:

- *How do you define prayer? What is the purpose of prayer in your life? Describe your current prayer life to the group. What works for you with this approach? What do you want to change?*





◦ *In Ginger Kolbaba's interview with Stormie Omartian ("The Power of Prayer"), Stormie is transparent about the anger she had to overcome. Where have you seen God work most significantly in your life? What deep character traits has God spoken to you about through prayer? How did you know God was communicating with you on a particular issue? How did you respond to his promptings to make certain changes in your life?*

◦ *Stormie Omartian also touches on the need to develop a longing for God. Have you experienced this kind of hunger for God in your own life? If so, how did you achieve this? If not, what do you think is keeping you from craving more of God?*





◉ *Author Kathy Callahan-Howell addresses the common dilemma—how we develop a Mary heart when we are wired with Martha brains. How have you learned to stop doing and moving long enough to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear from him? When have you received a fresh understanding of God through prayer or meditation?*

◉ **Read Matthew 6:9–13 together.** *Examine and discuss the Lord's Prayer line by line. What truths about prayer emerge? What should we be praying for daily? What parts of this prayer challenge you? What fresh insights are you receiving as you pray this prayer with fresh eyes?*





Live It

What place does prayer and meditation have in your life? Is God calling you to deeper times of reflection with him or more regular communication? Take some time over the next seven days to explore this topic further and apply it to your everyday life.

Day 1

Pull out your calendar and set aside specific time for the next seven days to spend with God. Whether it's 10 minutes or two hours each day, the important thing is to create the habit of talking with God and listening to him. Read **Matthew 6:9–13** slowly, even taking one line at a time each day. Journal your thoughts and impressions as you ponder the way Jesus instructs us to pray.





Day 2

Grab a notebook to use as a prayer journal. Begin today to keep a list of specific prayer requests. As you're moving throughout your day, lift up these requests to God. During your quiet times, review previous requests and begin to note the answers you receive.

Day 3

Take a risk today and ask someone how you can pray for them. Ramp it up a notch and ask if you can pray for her right then. This even works on the phone!

Day 4

The Psalms express some of the most heartfelt, passionate prayers ever written. They are also the prayers Jesus grew up with. Ironically, many of the psalms refer to Jesus. Choose one today and pray through it slowly, meditating on the emotions the psalmist expresses. When have you felt these same emotions? What traits or experiences of the psalmist do you relate to? How do you think Jesus would have felt praying through this psalm?

Day 5

Write down the names of people you long to see find God. As you read your Bible each day, jot down Scripture you can pray for these people, inserting their name as you pray through a verse. For instance, you might try praying **Ezekiel 36:26** like this: "Lord, will you give [Kathy] a new heart and a put a new spirit in her; please remove [Kathy's] heart of stone and give her a heart of flesh."





Day 6

Use today's chores and routines as a way to prompt you to pray. For instance, if you are folding laundry, pray for the person whose clothes you are folding. Find Bible verses that speak about clothes and armor, and pray those verses for the people in your family. As you do dishes, pray about God making you clean from the inside out. Let your daily routine become triggers for prayer.

Day 7

Return to Matthew 6:9–13. Meditate on the Lord's Prayer and pray for God to help you incorporate its truths into your life. Pull your calendar out again and set your prayer schedule for the following week. Make time with God a regular part of your day!



For the Leader



Interact

Use this bonus idea during your group's meeting time.

Some people are very intimidated at the prospect of praying out loud. Take time with your group to gently ease them toward this practice. Have each woman jot down a prayer request on a piece of paper. Place the requests in a basket, and then have each woman pick one. Take turns reading each prayer request, and lead your group with a response, such as, "Lord, have mercy; hear our prayer." Over time, as you introduce your group to different ways to pray, their comfort level for praying out loud will increase.



Connect

Use email or a phone call during the week to check in with the women in your group, encouraging them to do the "Live It" life application steps!



Divide your group into pairs. Ask each woman to share a specific prayer request they have for developing their own prayer life. For instance, one woman might ask for prayer that she set aside 10 minutes every day to talk with God. Another might ask prayer that God would cultivate a hunger in her to want to spend time with God. Allow 15 minutes for women to pray for each other in pairs. Encourage them to exchange phone numbers or email addresses so they can connect with each other during the week to see how their prayer time goes during the rest of the week.





Go Deeper

Want to explore this topic further? Or are you looking for resources to recommend to the women in your group? Check out the following books and web resources:

Going Deeper in Prayer, a Gifted For Leadership downloadable resource.

If you've ever struggled with your prayer life, know that you're in good company. As you seek to grow in this area, this download will help guide you. In it, you'll find articles that will challenge and grow your understanding of prayer. You'll find insights to help you evaluate this aspect of your leadership, as well as advice for strengthening and revitalizing it. We've also packed plenty of other resources inside for you to go even farther in finding the prayer life you've always wanted. Remember, doubts and uncertainties may come and go, but as we press on we'll experience abundance—for the righteous find life by faith (**Romans 1:17**).





Listening to the Holy Spirit, a Gifted For Leadership downloadable resource.

This download contains articles that illustrate what it means to lead in the power of the Holy Spirit. It invites us to examine ourselves to see if we are using the gifts the Spirit gives us as he directs. At the end of the articles, you'll find additional resources to help you go deeper in your quest for powerful leadership—the kind that is only available through the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Direction and Formation a Gifted for Leadership downloadable resource.

This downloadable packet from Gifted for Leadership explains what spiritual direction and formation mean. The guidance offered will help transform your spiritual life.

The Way of the Heart by Henri Nouwen, Harper One, 1991. This modern classic interweaves the solitude, silence, and prayer of the fourth- and fifth-century Egyptian Desert Fathers and Mothers with our contemporary search for an authentic spirituality. Applicable for all Christians, *The Way of the Heart* is especially beneficial to pastors and those immersed in ministry.

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home by Richard J. Foster (HarperOne, 1992). Best-selling author Richard Foster offers a warm, compelling, and sensitive primer





on prayer, helping you to understand, experience, and practice it in its many forms. He clarifies the prayer process, answers common misconceptions, and shows the way into prayers of contemplation, healing, blessing, forgiveness, and rest.

Foster shows how prayer can move you inward into personal transformation, upward toward intimacy with God, and outward to minister to others. He leads you beyond questions to a deeper understanding and practice of prayer, bringing you closer to God, to yourself, and to your community.

The Pursuit of God by A.W. Tozer (Wingspread Publishers). In the muddle of day-to-day life, have you somehow forgotten that Christianity is a living, vibrant relationship with a personal God? In this classic bestseller and recipient of both the ECPA Gold and Platinum Book Awards, *The Pursuit of God* reminds and challenges you to renew your relationship with your loving God. In each of the 10 chapters, Tozer explains one aspect of hungering for God and ends with a prayer.

