More time spent with fewer people leads to greater lasting impact for the Kingdom of God.

BSU Christian Challenge
New Mexico State University
Study Series

What to Pray For

If you are like me, you find that from time to time your prayer life needs a jolt out of the rut it has fallen into. We tend to use the same phrases over and over. We tend to default to worn out phrases (like the word default). We fall into patterns of mindless repetition.

The devil hates prayer. Our own flesh does not naturally love it. Therefore, it does not come full-born and complete and passionate from the womb of our heart. It takes ever renewed discipline.

Years ago, when I wrote Let the Nations Be Glad, I argued that prayer is a wartime walkie-talkie, not a domestic intercom. God is more like a general in Command Central than a butler waiting to bring you another pillow in the den. Of course, he is also Father, Lover, Friend, Physician, Shepherd, Helper, King, Savior, Lord, Counselor. But in this fallen “world with devils filled,” prayer will function best when we keep the frequency tuned to Command Central in the fight of faith.

So when I wrote that book, I gathered into one place all the things the early church prayed for. I printed this out for myself, and it has proven to be one of those “jolts” that I need. I thought you might find it helpful. You might want to print it out and keep it for a while in your Bible to guide you in your praying.

It is a great confidence-builder in prayer to know that you are not quirky in your praying. To pray what the New Testament prays is a safe and powerful way to pray.

Prayer remains one of the great and glorious mysteries of the universe—that the all-knowing, all-wise, all-sovereign God should ordain to run his world in response to our prayers is mind-boggling. But that is the uniform witness of Scripture. God hears and answers the prayers of his people. O do not neglect this amazing way of influencing nations and movements and institutions and churches and people’s hearts, especially your own.

If you want to pray for what the early church prayed for . . .

Pray that God would exalt his name in the world.

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” (Matthew 6:9)
Pray that God would extend his kingdom in the world.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

Pray that the gospel would speed ahead and be honored.

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you. (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

Pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:13; cf. Ephesians 3:19)

Pray that God would vindicate his people in their cause.

And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? (Luke 18:7 rsv)

Pray that God would save unbelievers.

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. (Romans 10:1)

Pray that God would direct the use of the sword.

Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. (Ephesians 6:17-18)

Pray for boldness in proclamation.

Praying at all times in the Spirit . . . and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel. (Ephesians 6:18-19)

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness. (Acts 4:29)

Pray for signs and wonders.

And now, Lord, . . . grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness . . . while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. (Acts 4:29-30)

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. (James 5:17-18)
Pray for the healing of wounded comrades.

Let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. (James 5:14-15)

Pray for the healing of unbelievers.

It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. (Acts 28:8)

Pray for the casting out of demons.

And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.” (Mark 9:29)

Pray for miraculous deliverances.

So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church . . . When he realized [he had been freed], he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. (Acts 12:5, 12)

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake. (Acts 16:25-26)

Pray for the raising of the dead.

But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, rise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. (Acts 9:40)

Pray that God would supply his troops with necessities.

Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)

Pray for strategic wisdom.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (James 1:5)

Pray that God would establish leadership in the outposts.

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)
Pray that God would send out reinforcements.

Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. (Matthew 9:38)

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:2-3)

Pray for the success of other missionaries.

I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints. (Romans 15:30-31)

Pray for unity and harmony in the ranks.

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20-21)

Pray for the encouragement of togetherness.

We pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith. (1 Thessalonians 3:10)

Pray for a mind of discernment.

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. (Philippians 1:9-10)

Pray for a knowledge of his will.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (Colossians 1:9)

Pray to know God better.

[We have not ceased to pray for you to be] increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:10; cf. Ephesians 1:17)

Pray for power to comprehend the love of Christ.

I bow my knees before the Father . . . [that you] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and
depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. (Ephesians 3:14, 18-19)

**Pray for a deeper sense of assured hope.**

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers . . . that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. (Ephesians 1:16, 18)

**Pray for strength and endurance.**

[We have not ceased to pray for you to be] strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy. (Colossians 1:11; cf. Ephesians 3:16)

**Pray deeper sense of his power within them.**

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers . . . what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. (Ephesians 1:16, 18-19)

**Pray that your faith not be destroyed.**

I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren. (Luke 22:32)

But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man. (Luke 21:36)

**Pray for greater faith.**

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24; cf. Ephesians 3:17)

**Pray that you might not fall into temptation.**

Lead us not into temptation. (Matthew 6:13)

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matthew 26:41)

**Pray that God would complete your good resolves.**

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power. (2 Thessalonians 1:11)
Pray that you would do good works.

[We have not ceased to pray for you that you] walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work. (Colossians 1:10)

Pray for the forgiveness of your sins.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

Pray for protection from the evil one.

Deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:13)

By John Piper, Fresh Words, October 10th, 2006.

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