



7 Days to More Effective Prayer

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Introduction

The Mystery and Power of Prayer

It may sound too familiar to say that we connect with God through prayer. That statement may be something we *know* but not something we *experience*. We give mental assent to it as a true statement even while yearning and longing for a deeper experience of relationship with God.

My journey of prayer has seen many peaks and valleys. I often find myself descending into a valley while looking ahead to the next peak.

I'm sharing this guide to help you learn how to pray better, more easily, and with more confidence. I want to share with you four phases I've gone through in my journey of learning how to connect with God in prayer. My hope is that you will find value in my experience for growing in your own practice of prayer.

First Phase: God as the Cosmic Santa Claus

I grew up "going to church." I imagine you could say I was "born and raised" in the church. Yet my concept of prayer was very anemic. Sure, we prayed at church, but it was the "opening" and "closing" types of prayer, along with a blessing offered before we shared the Lord's Supper together. And we prayed at home, though it was mainly a blessing before we ate or my father praying with my brother and me before we went to bed.

I knew that I ought to pray. And I knew that I ought to include praise and thanksgiving. But other than thanking God for the day and for anything good that had happened to me that day, I did not have a robust way of praising and worshiping God in prayer.

This was shaped by my view of God at the time -- a very weak, limited view that saw God as the Cosmic Santa Claus. He saw everything, he knew if I was awake, and he definitely knew if I was bad or good. As an adolescent, and then a teenager, I was fully aware that there was enough "bad" to warrant the Cosmic Santa Claus to not send "gifts."

So my prayers were mainly of the "Forgive me for X, forgive me for Y" variety. I would do this in bed at night before I went to sleep. Many

nights I would fall asleep scanning my mind for any unconfessed sin because I was fearful of missing some sin that I had overlooked. What would God think? After all, he was already aware of any sin that had been committed; how could I not be?

I found this phase of prayer fearful, even while it cultivated an awareness of God.

Second Phase: Finding Other Prayer Exercises

I must have known that there was more to prayer than what I was experiencing because I kept with it and I kept exploring it, especially in my junior and senior years of high school.

At my local Christian bookstore, I'd hunt for books about prayer. I found expositional teachings about prayer, prayer devotionals, and Charismatic books about prayer that I had no capacity to understand at the time. But most importantly, I found tools I could use to help me pray.

I ran across the A.C.T.S. acronym (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication). This was helpful because it gave me a framework. I realized that I could break up my prayer time into different areas. I still struggled with adoration but found my groove in confession. Thanksgiving could be tough, and I began to learn that this "toughness" came out of a skewed sense of prayer -- my belief that prayer was about asking God for things.

During this phase of prayer, I began to learn that prayer was not only about asking God for things, but also thanking God for things. But prayer was still transactional -- it was about making the exchange of thanksgiving and confession, the credits and debits, between God and myself.

Third Phase: Liturgical Prayer and Psalms

In college, I was exposed to a wide experience of Christian traditions. This was more helpful to me than I recognized at the time, and I learned without knowing it from many others.

I was particularly intrigued with the vibrancy that many of my new friends prayed with. It was a vibrancy I was lacking. I knew

something was missing in my relationship with God but I didn't know what.

I took an upper division-level class on Christian ministry with a professor who became very influential for me. He introduced us to the Christian classics of spirituality. We were also required to keep a reflections journal where we interacted with our readings. This was what I had been missing! A way of interacting with God that went beyond a transactional give-and-take!

I was introduced to *lectio divina*, the ancient way of reading the Bible that leads to meditation and prayer. I learned about the form of praying called contemplation. I began to read Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, and Eugene Peterson.

I began to see that prayer was at least as much about *being with* God as it was *talking to* God.

Eventually, I ran across liturgical prayer and the *Book of Common Prayer*. At the time, this was the missing link for me -- a way of praying through brief collects, longer canticles, and prayers of confession. And there was even space to read through the Bible in a three-year cycle!

I latched onto this form of "morning and evening prayer" and tried a variety of different forms. The value in learning to pray in this way is that I began to see that by slowly reading through and praying the prayers, even meditating on them, I was clearing out the "busy-ness" of my mind and creating space to simply be with God.

I eventually simplified this form to praying the Psalms. I began to pray through Psalms each month, all 150 of them. I used the psalms as my prayer book, reading, reflecting, and meditating on them in a monthly cycle that taught me the rhythm of giving thanks to God, praising him, lamenting, and finding refuge in him.

Fourth Phase: Learning to Lead Others in Prayer

I've never felt proficient in prayer, but I reached a point where I was satisfied with the way I was stumbling through it. I had fallen into a rhythm of praying the psalms daily, meditating on the Bible, being with God, and making intercession for others.

A good friend of mine then invited me to a Day of Renewal put on by Strategic Renewal and Daniel Henderson at the Chicago Tabernacle.

I went to this, along with a good friend from my church, and was absolutely blown away.

At this event, we learned a way of prayer that emerged directly from the Bible. Daniel called it the 4/4 pattern of prayer and summarized it as "scripture-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based prayer." He taught us to read a passage from the Bible, take note of the praiseworthy characteristics and attributes of God, and then pray these back to God in the areas of Reverence, Response, Requests, and Readiness.

The "4 R's" took their cues directly from the Bible. If God was described in the Bible as a Rock, then we praised him for being our Rock in a difficult time; we asked him to help us look to him as our Rock in times when we would need him; we petitioned him on behalf of others, that they would find him to be their Rock in times of trouble; and we asked him to help us walk by faith in that truth as we ministered to others.

This was life-giving for me. I had learned that prayer was about being with God, but now I could use the words of God to speak back to God. The Bible itself was my prayer manual. If I didn't know what to pray for, I could simply read a portion of the Bible and be overwhelmed with reasons to praise God, or with specific, biblical petitions to pray on behalf of others.

But most of all, in this phase, I was inspired to teach prayer to others. I began to pray more regularly with a network of pastors who prayed together and led their churches in biblical prayer. I began to build more prayer into the men's mentoring group I was leading. I created a monthly prayer meeting at my church.

Through these four phases, I learned how to be aware of God (phase one), to be more thankful for what God has done (phase two), to simply be with God (phase three), and to teach others these ways of prayer (phase four).

Perhaps you've seen yourself in this story. Prayer is both a mystery and a communion with God with great power.

How to Use This Guide

1. Find a quiet time and place where you can focus on prayer for 15-30 minutes.
2. Print out this guide, and bring it, along with your Bible and a notebook, to that quiet place.
3. Begin your time of prayer by asking God to quiet your mind and prepare you to speak to him, and to hear from him.
4. Read the Bible passage for the day three times, slowly. Read it first to get the sense of it, a second time asking God what he wants you to hear in it, and a third time asking God how he wants you to respond to it.
5. Pray your way through the prayer guide, following the given prompts or using your own. Take notes in a notebook if it is helpful.

DAY ONE – The Grace of God

Titus 1:1-4; 2:11-14; 3:3-9

Attributes of God

- He chooses (1:1); he is truth (1:2); he provides a path to godliness (1:1); he provides eternal life (1:2); he promises (1:2); he has a plan (1:3); he provides the message of salvation (1:3)
- He is grace and salvation (2:11); he teaches us (2:12); he provides the gospel and a blueprint to his ways (2:13-14)
- He is kind, loving and merciful (3:4); he saved us (3:5) by his Spirit (3:5); he generously gave us his Spirit (3:6) so we would become heirs to eternal life (3:7)

Reverence – How will you praise God?

- Lord, thank you for choosing me to be your elect...
- Our Good God, I praise you for your spiritual provision for us, seen in...
- Father, thank you for your kindness, love and mercy shown to me when...

Response – How will you respond to God?

- Lord God, help me to be obedient to your plan instead of...
- Father, teach me to say “no” to the ungodliness of...
- O God, help me to devote myself to the good deeds of ... instead of...

Requests – Who will you pray for?

- Father, please give [...] assurance of the salvation they have in you...
- O God, please help me/us to reach [...] with the goodness of your gospel...
- Lord, help us to be convicted of the power and strength of your gospel instead of our humanistic tendencies of....

Readiness – How will you pray for your spiritual preparation?

- God, help me to stay devoted to your plan this week amidst the distractions of...
- Lord, help me to focus on your grace and salvation instead of the temptations of...
- Father, help me to learn the way of your Spirit instead of trusting in...

DAY TWO – Peace and Praise

Ephesians 2:11-22

Ephesians 2 is about how God has formed the church in Christ. This section begins in 2:1-10, which sets the foundation for salvation through grace, and continues in 2:11-22 to show how salvation through grace applies to all people. God has taken care of all hostility that existed amongst different people. In the church, we are all at peace with God and with each other. There is much to pray for from this passage, from peace to praise to God's promises.

Reverence – How will you praise God?

God brought us near to him through Christ and peace to his church in Christ (2:13, 14, 17).

- Father, I thank you for bringing me near to you through Christ when...
- Lord, thank you for the peace that exists in the church, which I see in...

Response – How will you respond to God?

We ought now to live in hope towards God and in peace towards others (2:12, 16).

- Father, because you have given me peace, may I live in hope when...
- Lord, because you have given peace to your people, may I live peacefully when...

Requests – Who will you pray for?

Pray for those who need peace and who need to overcome hostility with others (2:14, 16).

- God, I pray for peace for [...] in...
- Lord, draw [...] near to you and bring [...] to peace in Christ

Readiness – How will you pray for your spiritual preparation?

How can we participate in building the holy temple of God this week?
(2:19-22)

- Lord, help me to be deliberate in being built into your temple this week when...
- Father, may I remember that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of your temple when...

DAY THREE – Knowing Christ and Making Him Known
John 3:16

In John 20:30-31, John says that the purpose of his gospel is to produce belief in Jesus that leads to eternal life. Belief, in John, is not limited to an intellectual decision about Jesus. Instead, “belief” includes the entire life. When we know Christ, we are transformed into his image, and we desire to make him known to others.

John 3:16 (NIV) ~ “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

<i>Attributes of God</i>	<i>Characteristics of our response</i>
God has a plan to redeem the world	We submit to God and his plan
God loves at ultimate cost to himself	We believe in Christ and God’s plan
God offers eternal life to the world	We celebrate eternal life
God makes belief in Christ instead of our own works central to salvation	We glorify Christ by sharing the message with others
God saves	We ask God to help us grow in belief
God glorifies his Son in salvation	We rely upon God, not our own strength

God Is Worthy – How will you praise God, with thanksgiving?

- God, I thank you for calling me in your plan of redemption when you rescued me from...
- Lord, thank you for letting me experience your sacrificial love in/when...

- Father, I praise you for saving me on the basis of my belief in Christ instead of my works because...

We Are Needy – How will you respond to God?

- Lord, help me to celebrate salvation in Christ by... [or, instead of...]
- Father, I believe, but help my unbelief in...
- God, you have granted eternal life in your plan of redemption; help me to lean on you instead of my own understanding in...

Special Intercessory Prayer – Prayers for the community

- Lord God, may your Son be glorified in this community by...
- Father, may we make known your love for this community by...
- Lord, may your salvation come to this community through...

DAY FOUR – Deliverance from Disobedience

Judges 2:6-23

Judges 2 explains how Israel fell from their state of obedience and victory at the end of Joshua to the situation that Judges describes, where Israel constantly turned from God, suffered, cried out to him, and found deliverance by God's mercy. This passage reveals God's mercy, but also his judgment and expectation of fidelity to him. It teaches us about our own tendency towards disobedience and reminds us of the futility of disobedience. Yet, God continues to deliver his people.

Attributes and Characteristics of God

- The Lord does great things for his people (7)
- The Lord is angry when his people turn away from him to idols (12-13)
- The Lord delivers his people over to their disobedience (14-15)
- The Lord delivers his people from their suffering through one he raises up (16)
- The Lord relents from punishment because of the cries of his people (18)
- The Lord is compassionate to his people despite their sin (18)
- The Lord tests the ability of his people to maintain obedience (22)

Reverence – How will you praise God?

- Lord, I thank you that you showed me your anger when I followed the idol of [...] and turned me away from that idol to you
- Father, thank you for showing me your compassion despite my sin when I was caught in the sin of...
- Lord, I praise you for revealing your holiness to me during...

Response – How will you respond to God?

- Lord, because you are a God who delivers your people, may I come to a deeper understanding of your deliverance in...

- Father, may I come to a deeper knowledge of your compassion for your people despite their sin, so that I can love and serve [...] more compassionately
- Lord, may I know your divine anger so that I will turn away from the idol of...

Requests – Who will you pray for?

- Lord, you heard the cries of your people Israel; now hear my cry for help about...
- Lord, you raised up a deliverer, Jesus, for your people; please help [...] to come to know that deliverance

Readiness – How will you pray for your spiritual readiness?

- Lord, give me deliverance over my tendency to disobey you in...
- Lord, give me remembrance of the great victory I have in Christ so that I will be encouraged to obey you when...

DAY FIVE – Christ, the Power and Wisdom of God
1 Corinthians 1:18-31

In this passage, Paul is correcting the Corinthian believers for being more interested in the personality and delivery of the preacher than in the content of the preached message. He reminds believers that God has called us from lowly places out of his wisdom, and that what looks like foolishness to the world is really the power of God for us—Christ, our salvation.

Attributes of God

- God's power is seen in the message of the cross (18)
- God has made foolish the wisdom of the world (20)
- God used his wisdom to make known the way of salvation (21)
- God has called his church into being (24)
- God has made Christ to be his power and wisdom to those whom he has called (24)
- God is more powerful and wise than humans (25)
- God chose weakness and foolishness in order to glorify himself in salvation (27-29)

Reverence – How will you praise God?

- Lord, I thank you that you called me into your church out of the foolishness of...
- God, I praise you that your power is so much greater than my own in...
- Father, I praise you for your glory that is seen in saving me from...

Response – How will you respond to God?

- Father, may I find humility in remembering that you called me out of the foolishness of...
- Lord, may I cease boasting about myself and boast only in you when...

- Father, when I'm tempted to glory in myself when [...] may I remember that it is Christ who is your power and wisdom in salvation

Requests – How will you pray for others?

- Lord, save [...] out of the foolishness they are living in...
- God, make known the wisdom of your way of salvation to...
- Father, help [...] to rely on your wisdom instead of their own in...

Readiness – How will you pray for your spiritual preparation?

- Lord, I'm most tempted to focus on my own strength in....; remind me always that my strength is in you
- Father, please help me to trust your wisdom, rather than my own, in...
- God, help me to remember that you have called your church together when I struggle to love...

DAY SIX – Gospel Prayer

Acts 4:23-31

Focus

The Lord is sovereign; he knew what would happen with Jesus and with Jesus' followers and is able to sustain those followers and equip them to preach the gospel

Attributes of God

- Sovereign Lord (24)
- Creator (24)
- Speaks prophetic words (25)
- Anointed Jesus as cornerstone of plan of redemption (27)
- Plan of redemption decided upon by his power and will (28)
- Enabler of boldness in gospel preachers (29)
- Able to perform wonders and miracles (30)
- Fills with his Spirit (31)

Reverence – How will you praise God?

“Sovereign Lord” (4:24) – “you made the creation; you spoke your words.”

- Lord, I praise you because I see your sovereignty in creation when/in...
- Lord, I give thanks to you because you have spoken words of...

Response – How will you respond to God?

“Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness” (4:29-30).

- Lord, because you are sovereign, enable us to speak your word with great boldness *when...* (pray over situations where you are reluctant to speak boldly)

Requests – Who will you pray for?

Pray for those who are facing actual oppression and opposition (4:29).

- Lord, enable your servants who are facing opposition to speak your word boldly *so that...*
- Lord, because you are sovereign, enable us to speak your word with great boldness *in...* (pray over situations in which there is opposition to speaking the word)

Readiness – How will you pray for your spiritual readiness?

Trust that God answers prayer and is faithful to his promises (4:31).

- Lord, help us to trust you and your promises when/in/so that....

DAY SEVEN – Trust and Faith in God

Matthew 6

In Matthew 6, Jesus discusses three spiritual practices (giving, prayer, and fasting) and how these should result in a more trusting walk with God. Reflect on this great chapter and the following attributes of God and then pray to God.

Attributes of God

- He is a rewarder of the obedient (1, 4, 18)
- He knows what you need (8) and provides (11)
- He is our heavenly Father (9) who is hallowed (9)
- He is a leader and deliverer (13)
- He is a forgiver of sins (14)
- He cares deeply for us (26)
- He is a provider for our needs (30)

Reverence – How will you praise God?

- Father, I praise you for knowing what I needed when [...] and providing [...] for me
- Lord, I worship you for being my heavenly Father who led me through...
- Father, thank you for showing me your deep care for me when...

Response – How will you respond to God?

- Lord, because you reward the obedient, help me to walk obediently in...
- Heavenly Father, may you be hallowed in my life through...
- Lord, because you are a forgiver of sins, please forgive me of...

Requests – How will you pray for others?

- Father, I believe that you know what [...] needs; please provide for him/her so that he/she will come to know you as their Provider

- Lord, please let [...] know of your care for him/her, so that they will come to a deeper knowledge of you
- Father, please deliver [...] from the trial he/she is facing, so that they will know you as their God

Readiness – How will you pray for your spiritual readiness?

- Lord, because you have cared for me, may I care for [...] as deeply as you cared for me
- Father, as you have forgiven me, may I forgive [...] when he/she sins against me
- Father, as my provider, may I turn to you in [...] for provision in...

Thank you for using this guide. I'd love to hear from you. Feel free to reach out to me at jeremyhoover@gmail.com.

About Jeremy

Jeremy Hoover lives with his wife and two children in Sarnia, Ontario, where they are missionaries with Love First Mission, serving people in secular culture and incarnating the gospel through relational ministry in neighbourhoods.

Jeremy has also served as a pastor for long enough to know how important soul-care is! He has a desire to help pastors who are struggling with burnout, going through transitions, or facing difficult challenges in their ministry. He provides coaching for pastors and offers seminars, workshops, and retreats.

Sign up for his daily email at jeremyhoover.com.

For coaching, speaking, or teaching inquiries, or to reach out to Jeremy, contact him at jeremy@jeremyhoover.com, or through jeremyhoovercoaching.com.

Find out more about Jeremy Hoover

Daily Email (Daily Discipleship)

jeremyhoover.com

Books (at Amazon.com and Amazon.ca)

Soul-Care for Shepherds: 31 Practices to Help You Shepherd Yourself So You Can More Effectively Shepherd Others –

<https://www.amazon.com/Soul-Care-Shepherds-Practices-Shepherd-Effectively/dp/B09R39GX34/>

The Delight and Demand of Discipleship: Lessons from Matthew 1-9 –

<https://www.amazon.com/Delight-Demand-Discipleship-Lessons-Matthew/dp/B09T8K1G3W/>

Joy in Jesus: Forays in Philippians – <https://www.amazon.com/Joy-Jesus-Philippians-Jeremy-Hoover/dp/B09WQBJBK5/>

Podcasts

Discipleship Conversations – discipleshipconversations.com

Love First Discipleship Podcast – lovefirstpodcast.com

Websites

Jeremy's ministry website – jeremyhooverministry.com

Jeremy's coaching ministry – jeremyhoovercoaching.com

Work with Jeremy

Do you need a speaker for your church or event, or someone to lead the congregation or church leaders in prayer leadership?

Do you need help getting your church unstuck?

Are you on a spiritual journey and could use the help of a trusted guide to help you sort things out?

Contact Jeremy at jeremy@jeremyhoover.com for help with any of these needs.

Recommendations

“I would highly recommend Jeremy Hoover. I was in need of assistance navigating potential growth opportunities for my organization. That is why I enlisted the support of Jeremy. As a coach he is relatable and decisive. His services were invaluable. He helped me work through complex decisions and gave me the insight I needed to create a plan of action. I appreciated the thought-provoking conversations and directness. Jeremy’s style is just what I needed, and I couldn’t be more pleased with the results. Not only does he have my recommendation, but he also has my gratitude.”

—Daniel Franks, Ohio

“Jeremy is an outstanding coach who is able to ask sharp and clear questions that helps you drive the mission of your life and church forward. I would recommend reaching out to Jeremy if you need a calm presence and someone to ask insightful questions to help clarify your cause and champion you with confidence.”

—Lantz Howard, ChampionHope.com

“Jeremy is very thorough, detailed and reliable, and follows through on his commitments. He is eager to help you learn and put things into practice.”

—Kevin Vance, Saskatchewan

“Jeremy is an excellent listener. He doesn’t give advice. Instead, he gently asks questions that help me find clarity. He has a compassionate, helpful demeanor that both considers my needs and focuses in on things I need to address. I am truly thankful for him. He continues to be a helpful conversation partner for me.”

—Brett Cody, Vermont

“I’ve known Jeremy for several years. He was trained in the Catalyze Coach training that I direct and led Discipleship Cohorts for Mission Alive. He is a skillful coach, effective leader, powerful disciple-maker, dedicated to the mission of God.”

—Stephen Shaffer, MissionAlive.org