

Grow in Prayer and Intercession

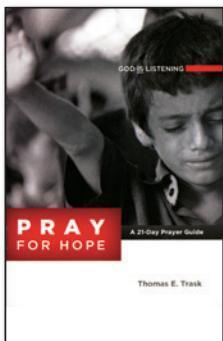
Additional Prayer Resources



Week of Prayer Poster



Week of Prayer Bookmark



Pray for Hope Booklet

CENTRAL TRUTH:

God calls His people to a consistent, growing, Spirit-led prayer life, embracing intercession as an act of loving ministry toward one another.

KEY VERSE: Ephesians 6:18

[Pray] always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (KJV).

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints (NIV).

Introduction

Missionary Willis Reed lay weak and helpless on the bank of the Ganges, his 12-year-old son by his side. With the nearest doctor 20 miles away, Reed's fever raged out of control. A sad reality began to take shape: He was dying.

Hours earlier, Reed and his son were driving home to Dhanbad, India. The day was hot, and they stopped at a roadside stand for a cold Indian drink called a *lassi*. As Willis took a gulp, he felt shards of broken glass cutting into his throat. Immediately, he knew he needed medical attention. But despite their rush, they reached the Ganges river too late, missing the last ferry of the day.

So Willis spent the night beside the river—a night his deteriorating condition would not allow him to survive. Yet, to the amazement of Willis and his son, he awoke the next morning in perfect health. Only later would he discover why.

While preaching in Arizona on furlough two years later, Willis was approached by a lady he didn't recognize. "I saw you in a vision," she began. "You were lying on the bank of a river. I had never met you, but God spoke your name to me. He told me to pray for you. I prayed until I felt assurance your need had been met."

Willis quizzed her on when this had occurred. It was the very moment he lay dying beside the Ganges. God had spoken to an anonymous woman thousands of miles away, using her prayers to work a miracle in his life.

Discuss: Ask students if they've ever experienced a time when they sensed an overwhelming need to pray for a person or a situation. How did they respond? Then move toward a more general discussion of how we might prepare ourselves to be used by God through prayer in this way. Note that such prayer encounters usually occur within the context of a strong, growing prayer life.

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Explain: God intends for our prayer lives to be alive and vibrant. Far from some rote practice confined to meals and Sunday mornings, our communication with God can touch every aspect of life. And when it does, we will find ourselves involved in the ministry of prayer in ways we never imagined. Through prayer will come opportunity to bless strangers, help the needy, comfort those who are hurting, and do spiritual battle. A healthy prayer life can lead us down avenues of communion with God that empower and equip us for service far beyond what we now experience.

Yet experiencing a dynamic prayer life doesn't happen by accident. We must grow in the discipline of prayer and intercession. Such a prayer life will change our attitudes as well as our actions.

1. Give the Gift of Prayer

Ask: What's the most special gift you've ever received? Why was it so special? *(Note that the most meaningful gifts we receive aren't valued because of their material worth, but because they come from someone dear to us and serve as an expression of how that person values us.)*

Explain: Christians can offer just this kind of gift every day, to friends, neighbors, loved ones, strangers, and even enemies. Yet it's not something we can buy in a store, or even something we can produce through our own effort. It's the gift of intercession—the act of genuinely and passionately seeking God on another's behalf.

Are you called to intercede?

Explain: Emphasize that intercession must not be confined to a few individuals; it doesn't require any special training or gifting. It simply demands that we possess a heart of compassion for another's need, and we're willing to respond by seeking God. In this sense, we are all called to the ministry of intercession.

Discuss: Note some reasons people struggle with practicing intercession regularly (i.e., feeling overwhelmed by certain needs, unworthy to approach God or ask Him for help, or hesitant to seek God on behalf of "unlikable" individuals, such as enemies). Discuss ways we can overcome these barriers.

Intercede for the lost.

- Ask:** What do each of these Scripture passages tell us about interceding for those who don't have a relationship with Christ?
- 2 Peter 3:9 — God longs to see the lost turn to Him. Yet our response must include more than external strategies and programs, although these serve valuable purposes. Rather, it must begin with, and be bathed in, prayer. (See Colossians 4:3,4; 2 Thessalonians 3:2.) Ultimately, the success of any evangelistic work depends on prayer.
 - Luke 10:1,2 — Jesus' instruction on evangelism didn't focus on specific giftings or ministries; rather, He simply called us to passionate, heartfelt prayer that the gospel would spread around the world. Thus, intercession is the highest calling of evangelism.

Intercede for the Church.

Ponder: Write the words, "The Church" on the board, and ask students to ponder how they define the term. What is the Church? How does it function? What is its purpose? After a few moments, explain that God has always intended the Church to be a tightly knit community of diverse people sharing a like faith as they care for each other's needs. Few Christian disciplines have the power to draw us together like prayer.

Discuss: Have students read Acts 12:1–11 in groups or as a class. Then talk about the events, as well as the impact they may have had on the Early Church. Note that passionate, unified prayer for a common spiritual purpose has power

to refine our vision and reinvigorate our trust in God. This is especially true when we are praying for someone we know and value.

Brainstorm: Have students list a variety of needs, crises, and situations that draw a congregation together in prayer. Note that while few of us will ever face imprisonment for our faith, we do encounter very real, challenging needs. Talk about how the following Scripture passages help us see the importance of intercession in times of need as the body of Christ: James 5:13–16; James 1:5–8; Philippians 4:19.

Intercede for spiritual growth.

Read: Read 2 Thessalonians 1:11,12, then explain that intercession must not end when the lost soul accepts Christ. The apostle Paul prayed just as fervently for the ongoing spiritual growth of the believers under his care. Why? Because it is all too easy to become distracted. Trials, temptations, success, and even boredom all threaten to draw our focus away from Christ.

Emphasize: Stress the importance of keeping in view the reality of daily spiritual battles we all face. Note that the fundamental method of preparation for battle is prayer. Ephesians 6:10–18 contains a familiar description of spiritual warfare. Yet in our study of the armor, we must not overlook the essential point, from verse 18: “With this [the battle] in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

2. Practice God’s Presence

Illustration: In 1967, Christian author Charles Hummel published a classic booklet titled, *The Tyranny of the Urgent*. In it, he asserted that a tension will always exist between what is most urgent in our lives and what is most important. Too often, he concluded, the urgent wins.

Hummel’s observation reveals a critical principle for the Christian life: following Christ requires an

ongoing evaluation of and commitment to godly priorities. If we fail to give our spiritual priorities proper importance, they will be overwhelmed by the daily urgencies that inevitably come our way.

Read: Have a student read Matthew 6:33, asking students what promise it offers. Then note that we must not focus only on the “all these things” aspect of the verse. The phrase “seek first the kingdom God” is also worthy of our embrace.

Explain: Maintaining a strong commitment to God through the urgencies of life comes through a spiritual discipline we might call “practicing God’s presence.” That is, we develop spiritual intimacy with God.

Cherish God through prayer.

Discuss: Read Luke 10:39–42, then discuss the differing actions and attitudes of Mary and Martha. Note that it’s tempting to place a value on our actions based on tangible results (i.e., What do we have to show for our time that we can hold or spend or enjoy?). Yet cherishing God has huge value in the spiritual realm, even if it at times seems to deliver little or no visible, temporal benefits.

Ask: What does it mean to cherish the Lord? (Have students read Matthew 11:28–30 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 as you discuss. Note that terms like “resting,” “relationship,” “drawing near,” and “communicating” help us understand cherishing, much as these terms reflect cherishing in our relationships with each other.)

Hear God’s voice through prayer.

Explain: Practicing God’s presence moves us beyond a prayer life centered on needs and concerns, as vital as these may be. As we follow this spiritual discipline, we discover new avenues of spiritual growth and strength, and learn to hear His voice in a loud and distracting world. In Him we experience peace and rest, gain proper perspective on

life and eternity, and maintain a strong spiritual compass in an increasingly secular society. (Note: Consider having students read the following verses in discussion: Psalms 16:11; 92:1,2; 139:7–16; 1 John 2:26–29; 3:19,20.)

3. Be Led by the Spirit

Invite: Invite students to share personal testimonies of times when they've experienced a time of uncertainty or helplessness. How did they respond, and how did prayer figure into that response? What did they learn about prayer through that situation. Note that during such times we often discover that our own understanding and wisdom cannot grasp the situation, and prayer is the only answer.

Read: Have a student read John 14:16,17, then discuss what these verses teach us about the Holy Spirit. Emphasize that no matter the situation, we are never alone; the Spirit is always there, interacting with us. This is even true in the area of our prayer lives. In the most difficult and confusing times, the Spirit helps us pray. And as we open our hearts to His voice, He can even help us seek God for needs we don't know or can't understand.

Activity: Have students read Romans 8:26,27 individually, then challenge them to ponder what the verse teaches. How would they define the "groanings" as well as the "weaknesses" mentioned in the verse? Consider distributing paper and pencils, and having them paraphrase the verse as it might apply to them.

Explain: Living in a flawed and often difficult world, we might find ourselves yearning for that moment when our adoption into the family of God is complete. Yet for now we continue to experience the weaknesses of our present lives. It's a battle we often cannot fight on our own. We respond by seeking God in prayer for help—help that often cannot be articulated in human words.

Sometimes we need the prayer help described in Romans 8 because the needs overwhelm us. Or perhaps we lack understanding to recognize God's direction. Or we're gripped with a burden to pray for someone else, even though we have no knowledge of his or her need. Those are times we need the help of the Holy Spirit, to "intercede for us" (verse 26). What a liberating promise: In times when words escape us, our words become utterly unimportant. The Spirit is directing our prayers.

4. Engage the Enemy

Discuss: Have a student read Ephesians 6:12, then talk about the following questions: "What are some real-life examples of spiritual warfare that you've faced in the past, and how did you respond? What role did prayer play in your response?"

Explain: We, like all believers since the birth of the Church, grapple with ongoing spiritual battles of various forms and intensities. The spiritual forces around us are powerful and not to be ignored. Yet in addressing spiritual warfare, our focus must not be on the enemy but on the Ultimate Victor, Jesus Christ. That way, we will never engage the enemy through our own strength; rather, we rest in the power and authority of Christ to win every victory.

Examine: Note that there are a number of ways we engage the enemy in spiritual warfare (discussed below). As you introduce each of the following points, assign a student to read the appropriate Scripture passage. Then talk about practical ways students can use this strategy when facing spiritual battles.

- **Engage through Preparation** (Ephesians 6:13–17; Hebrews 4:12): Preparation here involves cultivating spiritual disciplines such as Scripture study, faith, and commitment to righteousness.

- **Engage through Prayer** (Ephesians 6:18): Prayer is not a weapon. Instead, it is the primary means by which we participate in the battle. Through it we call upon the Lord, who alone has the power to win the battle.
- **Engage through Praise** (2 Chronicles 20:22; Psalm 22:3): Praise helps us take the focus off ourselves and our struggles, enabling us to focus on the One who wins the battle for us.
- **Engage through Jesus' Name** (Mark 16:17; Luke 10:17): This means much more than just repeating His name, more than just reciting words. To do something in the name of Jesus means acting as His representative and using His delegated authority. Prayer in the name of Jesus is powerful because we're calling on the One who is all-powerful.
- **Engage through Intercession** (Daniel 10:1–14): Intercession can, indeed, involve intense spiritual battles. In this sense, God sometimes calls believers to intercede on behalf of strangers, or to seek Him for those facing a moment of peril even when we have no knowledge of the situation.

5. Trust God

Ponder: Ask students to ponder for a moment this question: “Why doesn’t God answer some prayers, even when we seek Him over and over, for months or even years at a time?” Note that we can gain insight into this question as we consider who God is, what He does, and how we relate to Him.

Explain: God is both absolutely sovereign and entirely loving. Thus He answers to no one and cannot be defeated by any circumstance, while at the same time He possesses intense care and interest into our needs. So when we grapple with the issue of unanswered prayer, we must keep one word in view: trust. This includes trust in God’s power as well as His compassion.

Discuss: Have students read the following passages of Scripture, each related to a particular aspect of trust. Then discuss the question following each of the two topics listed.

- **Trust God’s power and wisdom** (Psalm 139:3,6; Romans 11:33,34): God’s understanding, His resources, and His wisdom all reassure us that His actions reach far beyond our ability to comprehend them. The essence of trusting God, then, is resting in the promise that He will do good for us even when we can’t understand what He’s doing or what that “good” might be.
- **Trust and obey** (James 1:22; 2:14–17): Obedience often can be more difficult than faith, requiring even more trust. Obedience means putting action to our faith and trust—investing our time, resources, and confidence, with the assurance that God will not disappoint.

6. Don’t Give Up!

Explain: Perhaps the two biggest questions we ask concerning prayer are: “How will God respond to my prayer?” and “When will God respond to my prayer?” Both questions call us to greater expressions of trust. It’s hard to wait for the answer, especially when we have no idea of how the prayer could possibly be answered. In those times, persistence is key.

Discuss: Have a student read Luke 11:5–10, then talk about what this passage teaches concerning persistence in prayer. Note that asking, seeking, and knocking refer to ongoing action; God is not put off by persistence. Instead, He welcomes our requests and encourages us to seek Him with persistence, knowing that He as a loving God will not hesitate to bring good things into our lives.

Brainstorm: Ask students to think of reasons why people give up on seeking God for a specific need, or perhaps even fail to begin praying. Answers could include a lack of trust in God, a

sense of unworthiness to approach God, discouragement with a lack of visible results, and the distractions of life.

Read: Have a student read Luke 18:10–18, inviting students to ponder aloud the meaning of this passage as it pertains to prayer. Emphasize that God is not an unjust judge, but a loving Father, intimately concerned about our needs. He wants us to seek Him without fail. Finally, have students read the following verses, then discuss what each tells us about persistence in prayer.

- Hebrews 4:16 — God wants us to be bold in prayer, placing firm confidence in Him.
- 1 John 5:14,15 — We can trust Him for answers when we pray in line with His will.
- Romans 12:12 — Faithfulness is a high virtue in the lifestyle of a praying believer.
- Colossians 4:2 — Sincere prayer demands a high level of devotion and commitment.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17 — An ongoing attitude of prayer is indicative of a consistent prayer life.

Explain: The challenging thing about persistence in prayer is that we may never know why the persistence is required. Yet whether a delay is rooted in an unseen spiritual battle, a personal test of our faith, or something we could never comprehend within the human mind, we never err when we place our trust in God. (Read Psalm 34:15.) Lack of an answer does not mean God isn't listening. He hears, and the timing of His response is often only perceived in the light of eternity.

Conclude

Personal Challenge Activity:

Have students reflect on what they perceive to be the most difficult challenges to their development of a strong, vibrant, and consistent practice of intercession. Remind them of some of the issues discussed in this study. Encourage them to make a list of these barriers, as well as specific steps they can take and strategies they can follow to conquer these barriers. This list can be kept in a prominent place, reminding them of the consistent effort and commitment necessary to make the practice of intercession a regular part of our lives.

Ministry Activity:

Take a few moments to brainstorm some of the most pressing needs in your church, your community, and around the world. Make a note of each, and spend a few minutes interceding for these as a class. Then encourage students to focus on just two or three of their choosing, and commit to praying for these needs daily. Explain that after they have done so for several months, they should take inventory of the impact of this prayer commitment. How have circumstances surrounding the need changed? How have students' perceptions of the individuals and situations involved changed? How has this prayer commitment impacted their relationship with God? Emphasize that prayer for someone will naturally increase our love and compassion toward that individual, as well as our perception of their need. And as our love grows and our spiritual focus becomes sharpened, our walk with God will grow stronger as well.

Prepared by the Assemblies of God National Prayer Center
www.prayer.ag.org

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