

Tenacity
Selections on Prayer

by Janet Sketchley

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Does Prayer Work?

Does prayer work? If we believe it does, or even if we only hope it might, we've probably whispered "Please help them" about someone we care for, at least once.

The better we know God's character, and the longer we've walked with Him, the more confidence we have in prayer. He's developing our faith. Even so, praying for people is tricky.

We can't ask for what we think is best, because God has a much bigger view of the situation than we do. If their current hardship is a building block for His work in their lives or to draw others to Himself, who are we to get in the way?

"Prayer is the verbalization of your total dependence on God." ~Dr. Wayne Barber

As such, it's more than a wish list. It includes recognizing who God is, praising and thanking Him, asking forgiveness of those things that have come between us, asking for His perspective in our lives... and listening to Him.

The intercession part, where we're committing others' needs (and our own) to God's care, is vital. It's not about giving God advice—or instructions. And it's not like we have to point out the issue to Him. He already knows all about it, and has a plan for what's next.

My grandmother prayed daily for each family member by name. She called it her "knee work." Whether we're that diligent about it or we only pray for our loved ones when there's a crisis, reaching out to God on their behalf is natural.

When we don't know what to ask, we can commit them to His care. I often pray for sustaining grace and that the individual(s) will allow their circumstances to draw them nearer to God. For open eyes and hearts to recognize His care in the middle of their stress. For faith, perseverance, and courage.

It's important to pray for the people we interact with. We know their needs, and often we can be part of the comfort, support or help they need. God may want to answer our prayers for them through us.

When Our Role is to Pray and Wait

When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father...'

Luke 15:17-18a NLT

If there's something our loved ones need to learn or change in their thinking, we can trust God to make it plain to them.

That's a huge comfort as we pray. And it makes perfect sense. After all, it's God who initiates the contact, who softens hearts and gives faith.

When the young man in the parable left home, his father's only option was to pray. Jesus didn't say he did, but I think it's implied by how he was watching and waiting for his son's return.

We don't know how long he waited, either.

The father knew the trouble his son could get into, and he presumably prayed for physical and spiritual protection. I'm guessing he also prayed for God to change the young man's heart and bring him home.

He may well have prayed in terms of love, light and freedom.

God our Father, thank You for revealing Your love to us, shining Your light of truth on our lives, and giving us freedom to choose You. Help us as we pray for those we love who don't yet trust You. Help us pray in love, power and confidence, and help us wait for Your perfect timing as You draw them to know You. You love them even more than we do, and in this we will rest.



Benefits of the ACTS Prayer

One of the simpler and most familiar structures for prayer is **ACTS**. Not that we need a formula to approach God, but it can be good to have a guideline to keep from forgetting anything important. I've been using this one lately to stay focused, and have found some other benefits as well.

Adoration:

1. I have a bad habit of starting prayer in mid-conversation. I know we're encouraged to develop the habit of praying unceasingly, but when I stop for an intentional "quiet time" prayer, just me and God, it's worth going back to the beginning to remind myself Who He is. It's polite, reverent, and it quiets my heart and puts everything in perspective.
2. Thinking of God's attributes and authority reinforces it in my mind so I'm less likely to feel alone and unprotected in the rest of my day. (How sad is it to need reminding of His care?)

Confession:

1. Looking at God's greatness makes me aware of my own smallness and failings. Not that He wants to put me down—but He can't grow me in His image if I don't see the problems and ask for His help and forgiveness. Regular confession helps me recognize the "little" sins that are easy to gloss over and to let fester.
2. Receiving His forgiveness erases any barriers my sin has caused that might keep me from hearing or obeying Him.

Thanksgiving:

1. How can I be anything but thankful that He forgives me and wants to help and heal me?
2. Gratitude is crucial to my well-being and with all God does for me, it's rude to take His gifts for granted. (How sad is it that we forget to notice and say thank You?)

Supplication:

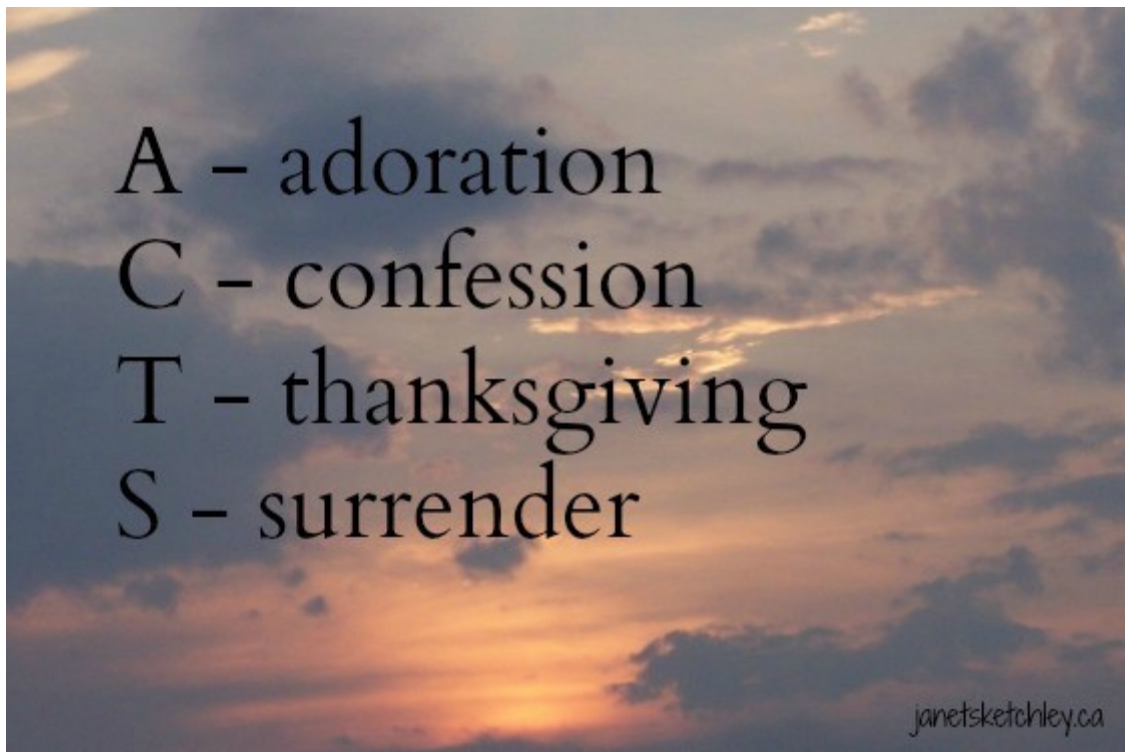
1. Okay, "supplication" is too outdated a word for something that's still current, so I call this part "**struggles**." It's the "prayer requests" part that too often we jump into without bothering with the other aspects. Coming after the other parts of the prayer, it's in better perspective. By this point, I'm better focused on God, we've cleared up any communications issues, and I've looked at some of the ways He's showed His care. I'm now in a good place to confidently bring Him needs: mine and others'.

2. I suppose the S could also be for “**surrender**” because that’s the best thing to do with these issues. In bringing them to God, I need to release them with “not my will but Yours.” This is so much easier after spending a few minutes adoring, confessing and thanking, because I’m more aware of our relative positions and abilities. I’m less tempted to be sure I know best, and less tempted to doubt His care, integrity or power.

Period

1. We don’t really end with the “please help”. If we pray until we have peace about what’s troubling us, we end with confident trust in God’s care. Adding another letter would mess up the memory device, so I’ll end with a period. “Full stop,” as the British would say. For the purposes of intercessory prayer, the period declares “I’ve given it to God and I’m leaving it there. He will deal with it in His perfect wisdom, love and time. I will not fret in the waiting.”
2. The period also reminds me to stop talking and listen. Prayer is, after all, dialogue. If I fill the time with my yammering, I miss God’s quiet voice.

ACTS. As well as the way this format helps me focus, I love how it can expand or contract to match the time I have for prayer. It’s a great way to start the day, and it puts me in an attitude of prayer that carries with me when I’m back in the fray. I still mess up, but even then if I’ve started well with prayer it’s easier to turn back to God and carry on.



Joy and Security

*Because you are my helper,
I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings.
I cling to you;
your strong right hand holds me securely.
Psalm 63:7-8, NLT*

I've been reading Psalm 63 daily for a few weeks now, and although it's short, it's powerful. David is longing for God, and he's aware of his enemies pressing in, yet the verses overflow with words like **praise** and **joy** and **sing**. He has his faith perspective in place.

I know about pressing through in prayer, bringing God our fears and troubles. Leaving those troubles with Him. Praying until it becomes about Him rather than about us. Until we're worshipping. Praising.

I don't do it nearly as often as I should.

That's what David's doing here. He knows he's hiding in the desert, knows his enemies' plots. He's not denying or ignoring them.

But he sees God. He knows God is enough.

He's not perching timidly in the shadow of God's wings, trembling in that strong hand because the danger might snatch him away. He has no thought that God might drop him or fail to protect him.

Our God, You are strong and mighty to save. You are our strong tower, our refuge, our shelter and our Defender. You are our Good Shepherd. We know the words, but so often we don't act like we believe them. We run to You and keep watching our troubles as if they might break through Your defenses. Faith tells us that can't happen. Help us listen and be confident in You.

When God Says No

But because of you the LORD was angry with me and would not listen to me. "That is enough," the LORD said. "Do not speak to me anymore about this matter."

Deuteronomy 3:26, NIV

This is part of Moses' final address to the Israelites, and he's referring to the incident where he lost his temper with disastrous results.

Moses is blaming the people, who surely tried his patience, but he was the one who acted in a way that didn't honour God.

He tells them he asked God to relent and let him into the Promised Land. But God said no.

Not just "no". "Don't ask Me again." Period.

There are other times in the Bible where God gives the people what they want when they insist on it, even though it's not in their best interests. Psalm 106:15 says in the King James Version, "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul."

Romans 1 talks about people continually turning away from God until He "gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts" to all manner of wicked living. (Romans 1:24, NIV)

We're called to persist in prayer. I think it comes down to trust: God is good, and He knows best. And He has the right to make choices—from His greater wisdom—that we may not like.

It's about persisting until we get an answer—not until we get the answer we want.

Silence may be a sign to keep praying. "No" is an answer.

Mighty and holy God, You are all-wise and You love us. Help us to pray with praise that You listen and answer. And help us to hear Your answers, be they yes or no. Grant us faith to trust Your goodness, and obedience to not push for our own ways when You reveal them to be against Yours.

Names of God in Prayer

One of my favourite Old Testament stories is Joshua leading the nation of Israel across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. You can read about it in Joshua 3. Here's the pep talk Joshua gives the people before they set out:

*Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of **the LORD your God**. This is how you will know that **the living God** is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. See, the ark of the covenant of **the Lord of all the earth** will go into the Jordan ahead of you. Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—**the Lord of all the earth**—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."* Joshua 3:9-13, NIV Emphasis mine.

In that short passage, look at how Joshua refers to God: "the LORD your God... the living God... the Lord of all the earth (twice)"

Knowing and reminding ourselves of the names of God can affirm and strengthen our faith.

Joshua chose traits the people needed to remember for the journey ahead. He knew they needed to keep their faith strong in a land of giants (Numbers 13:33).

I always love it when public prayer goes beyond "Dear God" and the leader picks one or two relevant character attributes to address the need: "God of comfort and grace, All-wise and knowing God, God who formed us and knows our weakness..."

It's a good way to encourage our faith.

Do you have a favourite name for God in prayer?



Names of God in Praise

We've talked about how using the names of God in prayer can affirm and strengthen our faith. Different aspects of God's character seem especially appropriate to different prayer needs we face.

Choosing one of God's descriptive names helps in praise too. I like to pick just one and spend time thinking what it says about His nature, His glory, His honour. They comfort me, encourage me, and inspire me to praise Him.

Some of my favourites:

Ancient of Days (Daniel 7)

Father to the Fatherless (Psalm 68:5)

My Rock and My Redeemer (Psalm 19:14)

My Shepherd (Psalm 23)

The Author and Finisher of our Faith (Hebrews 12:22, KJV)

Why not take time to list some of yours?



Bullying and Prayer

Bullying includes harm by word as well as by fist.

Increased awareness and social pressure is presumably making a difference, but in some cases maybe it's making the perpetrators craftier. Texting and social media make it easier to shoot from a distance.

Our communities' kids are under attack, and that's nothing new. They're vulnerable to one another—and to the enemy of our souls. How can they defend themselves, when it hurts too much to just walk away?

In Psalm 109, David opens his prayer with these words:

My God, whom I praise, do not remain silent, for people who are wicked and deceitful have opened their mouths against me; they have spoken against me with lying tongues. With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause. (Ps. 109:1-3, NIV)

David was bullied too, even as an adult. But David, a man after God's own heart, knew where to go for help. How many of our kids do?

His prayer starts with this cry for help (Ps. 109:1-5) and then launches into what looks like a prayer for vengeance (Ps. 109:6-20). In typical Old Testament mindset, it carries the punishment for the bully's acts into the lives of his wife and children.

Living under grace, I'm not comfortable with that. I'd rather pray for our kids' bullies to be set free from their own spiritual darkness and to come into Jesus' light.

I can't call down vengeance. That's God's territory and I've needed too much grace myself. But look again at those verses. Sometimes it's only when "what goes around comes around," when we're on the receiving end instead of in control, that we realize the truth.

God knows what it will take for bullies to understand the damage they're doing, and if personal experience is what it takes, then may He bring it on. I still pray that with the end of the bully-life will come rebirth into Kingdom-life.

Ultimately, the prayer asks God to deal with the bullies. David knows he can't fight this himself. Hear what he says:

For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me. I fade away like an evening shadow; I am shaken off like a locust. (Ps. 109:22-23, NIV)

Can't you feel his pain?

David knows how to pray. He comes to God, the highest Authority, and he holds nothing back: this is how I feel, this is what I'm asking in my anger and my pain, I'm asking You to repay my accusers. And I'm asking You to "help me, LORD my God; save me according to your unfailing love. Let them know that it is your hand, that you, LORD, have done it." (Ps. 109:26-27, NIV)

See how his prayer comes around to God? Not only for vengeance and help, but for God's own glory? David is under God's care, and he wants the world to know not just for his own sake, but for God's.

He has laid out his need and his pain, and now he turns his focus to his God. In the moment, while circumstances are unchanged, David finds the strength to voice praise:

With my mouth I will greatly extol the LORD; in the great throng of worshipers I will praise him. For he stands at the right hand of the needy, to save their lives from those who would condemn them. (Ps. 109:30-31, NIV)

David left us a valuable prayer to offer for our youth, for our friends, for ourselves. It reminds us that **our God is Mighty to Save.**



God Hears Us

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

John 1:47-49, NIV

I've been told an Israelite's fig tree in those days was a place of prayer. I like to imagine that whatever Nathanael's prayer time had been that day, it was personal, intense. He meant business with God. Maybe he questioned if God really heard him, and if He'd ever send the promised Messiah.

Now something in Jesus' words, or a look in His eye, lets Nathanael know God had heard.

I'm making this up. But God does hear us, and sometimes He lets us know.

This morning after my quiet time with God, I turned on K-LOVE internet radio. Amid the friendly chatter, a lady called in to say she'd just read their Encouraging Word for the day on her Blackberry—and something in the verse spoke directly to what she'd been praying about. She knew God had heard.

I listened with half an ear until the next song began and my spirit shivered—the Newsboys' "I Am Free" pointed right back to Isaiah 53, the Scripture I'd read twenty minutes earlier as I prayed for myself and for a friend. When the song started playing, I was in the middle of typing an email of encouragement to my friend.

Tell me God doesn't hear prayer. The sun isn't hot, either.

Father God, You are El Roi, the God Who Sees. Who loves us and has compassion on all He has made. Forgive our doubts when we wonder if You've heard us. Thank You so much for those very personal moments when You touch our individual spirits to let us know You hear.

Working Out ... My Faith

I've finally found a daily personal workout routine that suits me. Friends told me about its benefits, but I didn't really believe them until I proved it for myself.

Sure, I knew it would be good for me, but it seemed like such an effort. And how long would I manage to stick with it? I'd tried before.

I decided to work at it for six weeks. After that, the experiment would be over, and there'd be no shame in quitting.

The first thing that changed was my attitude. Once I started looking at this as something to anticipate, I stopped procrastinating. It's not a boring ritual, but a way to renew my energy and purge my stress.

Putting consistent time into it every day is far more effective than my hit-and-miss efforts in the past. I'm starting to see results.

This time, I'm committed to the process. That means no more filtering the instructions through my own understanding, or treating them as suggestions that I can choose to ignore. If I'm going to give this a real chance, I have to do it right.

And I can't be critical of others who follow the same regimen. If they look too good to be true, perhaps they've been practicing longer—or more faithfully. If they seem weak, maybe they need some encouragement. Ideally, these workouts have a group component to complement the daily personal one.

I've found it helpful to have someone to act as coach at times. A friendly observer can point out where my form needs improvement. And an extra set of eyes reading the Manual can keep me from getting off-base in my interpretation.

Plus, there's the accountability factor. I don't want to have to admit it when I slack off!

My trial period is over now. I'm more energized and focused, and my whole outlook on life is better. The results convinced me this is a worthwhile activity. I'm still tempted to be lazy, but I don't give in very often. I want to keep growing stronger.

It amazes me that daily quiet times with the Lord can make this much of a difference. These special times when I savour God's presence in prayer and in the Bible have become my soul's anchor in my busy days. My spiritual muscles are getting stronger.

Maybe I should try some push ups ...

A Jesus Prayer Day

When [blind Bartimaeus] heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Mark 10:47-48, NIV

Into the middle of busy schedules and global crises, Monday brought the news that a young boy in our community had taken his life. He was maybe 15, 16?

How do you pray for something like this? There are words: “comfort the family, send them caring support, help his friends...”

I did some of that, but the need just felt too big. But I remembered reading about the Jesus Prayer in an online-only bonus article in *Faith Today*.

The NIV has eight references to a people crying out variations of “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Trusting that the Holy Spirit intercedes when we don’t know how to pray, I gave Him the burden by repeating “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy.” Mercy toward family, friends, He knew best.

The peace surprised me, but it shouldn’t have. I’d stopped trying to carry—and fix—the problem, and given it to the Master Healer and Builder.

The exact wording of the Jesus Prayer is **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”** It’s meant for more than forgiveness, for any kind of need. The “sinner” part is to remind us how powerless we are to help ourselves.

With all that’s going on in the world, near and far, we’re pretty helpless. Item 24 in my new gratitude journal is “Thank You for giving me the Jesus Prayer for when I’d need it.”

And thank You for Your great mercy, poured out in our lives. Open the grieving to receive it. Open us all to see our need of it. And I praise and thank You, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, that You don’t leave us as orphans in this world. That You care, and that You give the peace of Christ.

Quiet Times with God

Just like we need intentional time with our loved ones and close friends, sharing our hearts and weaving our lives together, we need a daily quiet time with God. Time to read, pray, listen and learn.

It's not enough to know *about* God. We need to *know Him*.

Daily quiet times require self-discipline. Like any positive habit, they're hard to establish and easy to break. We can be tempted to get legalistic over them or to load guilt on ourselves when we get off-track, but that's not the point. They're an invitation to be alone with the God who made us.

Find even five minutes to get alone with God. You'll be the richer for it.

The time and place don't matter as much as that it happens. Consistency does help, but not if a rigid schedule strangles you. Think of time with God as the most valuable "rock" you'll put in the daily jar. Make sure it gets in there at some point.

If you're easily distracted like me, first thing in the morning may be best. I can't do the "somewhere in the day" option because I forget. At one point when that wasn't an option, I aimed for "tea with the Lord" right after lunch. Some people mark "appointment with God" in their daily planners, which could have the added bonus of startling friends or co-workers who happen to snoop.

Establishing the routine of a daily quiet time is about quieting ourselves before the God of the universe and allowing Him to shape and grow us. We'll be better off for it because we'll be growing spiritually and better equipped to face what comes at us.

And relationship with Him is still the best.



Why Pray for our Leaders?

Do you ever look at world or civic government leaders and despair that things will never change?

The Bible instructs us to pray for our leaders, but do we? And if so, do we have any hope it'll make a difference?

God *can* influence leaders, even those who don't know Him. Scripture gives us some examples:

- Pharaoh Neco of Egypt brought his armies near the territory of Judah, claiming he was on a mission from God to fight another nation. King Josiah, a godly man, didn't believe him, fought him, and died. (Read the account in 2 Chronicles 35:20-23 including verse 22, which begins "But Josiah refused to listen to Neco, to whom God had indeed spoken.")
- Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon saw God's power protecting the prophet Daniel as well as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (in the fiery furnace) but then he got distracted by his own sense of greatness. God sent him into madness until he could realize the truth—and then brought him to his senses. (Daniel 4 tells the story.)
- King Cyrus of Babylon is mentioned in prophecy as the restorer of the Temple over 100 years in advance (Isaiah 45:13, before Jeremiah even prophesied the 70 years of exile). The Book of Ezra says God put it in Cyrus' heart to do this, and then moved the hearts of the Babylonian citizens, and then of the exiled Israelites themselves, to support the work.

These stories encourage me to pray regularly for our leaders (as the Bible urges in 1 Timothy 2:2), and to pray with more confidence that God *can* and *may* influence them. If He doesn't, we can trust Him to work in and through the situations, however bad they may be.

Our job is to pray. For world leaders, national, local, even down to leaders in business, education and health care. Instead of getting cynical or hopeless, we can make a difference by inviting God into the mess.

If God can change the heart of a heathen king and use him for His purposes, how much more scope will He have to work in the hearts of leaders if we're praying for them?

Praying in the Dark

*"Who among you fears the LORD
and obeys the word of his servant?
Let him who walks in the dark,
who has no light,
trust in the name of the LORD
and rely on his God."*

Isaiah 50:10, NIV

The past few weeks have weighed a bit heavily on me. Prayers, alone and in groups, dwell on a mountain of needs: sickness, death, emotional suffering.

In one of my prayer groups, a member spoke of having a hard time "seeing God's plan" in a heartbreaking need. Not that God caused the problem, but why isn't He intervening with the miracle we're praying to see?

I thought of this on Good Friday. Nobody could see God's plan when it included Jesus dying on the Cross.

But He had a plan.

And it shook the universe.

If we know God's character, we know we can trust Him. Even when He's silent and everything is going all wrong.

So I choose to keep bringing the sick and wounded to Him, bringing my lack of vision too.

Father, prayer isn't meant to dwell on the problems, but to dwell on You. Forgive us when we get it wrong. Thank You that we can bring these needs to You. Help us find our rest in who You are, in Your character and Your promises. When we can't see Your plan, let us see You – caring, moving, sustaining.

Praying into the Light

*"Give ear, O God, and hear;
open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name.
We do not make requests of you because we are righteous,
but because of your great mercy."*

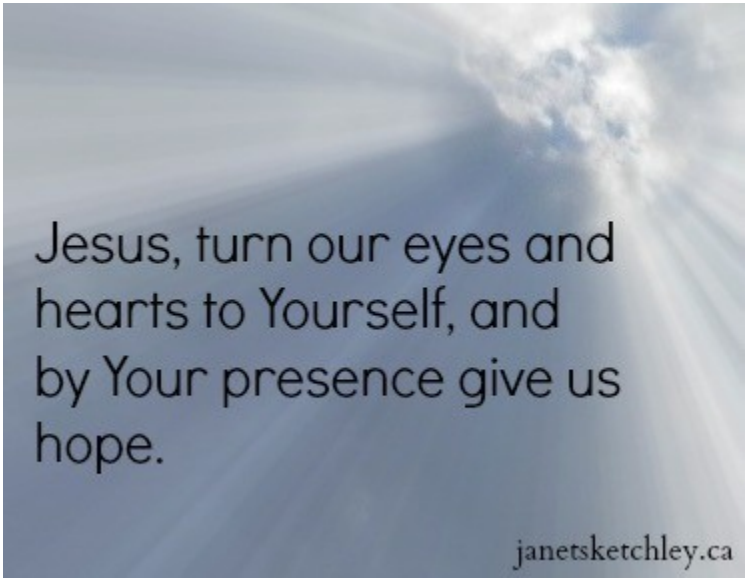
Daniel 9:18, NIV

Sometimes the very magnitude of prayer needs can reach a point where prayer feels more like a barrier to fellowship with the Lord than a doorway into His presence. We ask and don't receive. We knock and hear no answer. The mountain's not going anywhere but up.

Still God invites us to bring our cares and needs to Him. (1 Peter 5:7)

As we pray, may God grant us to yearn for Him, to see Him, to be still long enough to sense His presence. We may come because of external need, but let's stay until we're reminded that our souls' real need is Him.

Father, thank You we can find our rest in You, that we can bring all things to You, our Rock and our Salvation. Turn our eyes and hearts to Yourself, and by Your presence give us hope. Help us rejoice no matter what our circumstances, because You are mighty to save, and You are with us.



Jesus, turn our eyes and
hearts to Yourself, and
by Your presence give us
hope.

janetsketchley.ca

Would You Pray for a Stranger?

Sometimes God nudges me to pray for strangers. A news item, a sporting event, even a song can suggest a prayer. It may be a one-time connection, or I may carry it for months.

It sounds odd, praying "facelessly" for people I don't know, but I've stopped second-guessing. If it's from God and I obey, He will use it. If it's my own idea, extra prayer can't hurt the person.

The harm would be if I allowed it to eclipse the needs of my family and those around me, the people God may want to touch through me. I confess, as an introvert, the face to face interaction is harder, but it's an important part of the Christian life.

So I pray for my friends and loved ones, and I join others at my church each week because group prayer is powerful. And I occasionally pray for strangers I'll never meet.

There's biblical precedent. We're called to pray for our leaders and those in authority over us. (1 Timothy 2:1-4) Think about our leaders: political, business, educational. Think of people in the news, celebrities. What about Christians in those places?

If Lord Acton was right, "power tends to corrupt." Since high-profile people attract flatterers, manipulators and temptations, they surely need prayer. Christians wear an even bigger target, because the enemy of our souls is out to discredit them and the God they serve.

Could my prayers make a difference? Could yours?

We might be praying for *others*, but sometimes it changes *us*. Feeling cynical and disillusioned about a certain leader? Sincere prayer for wisdom, integrity and courage may help him or her. It will also change our perspective. It's a lot harder to complain about someone when we've become concerned about their wellbeing.

Praying for an offender can help us forgive, no matter how grave the crime. It doesn't mean we endorse or approve of what they did, but it frees us. They've already caused hurt. Why give them the power to keep it up?

Who knows? It might make a difference in that person's life. I don't fully understand the Bible verse about what we bind or loose in heaven and on earth staying bound or being loosed, (Matthew 18:18) but if holding a grudge could block someone else's chance at redemption, I don't want that on my conscience. No matter what they've done.

Plus, we do have that niggling phrase from the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us." (Matthew 6:12, NLT)

How have you experienced prayer changing others? Changing yourself?

Unlikely Warriors

Every Wednesday morning, a small group of women gathers in our church for prayer. They come to connect with one another in the presence of a loving and powerful God. They believe God is interested in the details of their lives.

The coffee is always hot, the atmosphere relaxed and inviting. Most ladies have at least one prayer request to share with the others. Some bring needs, others praise. Nothing is considered too big or too trivial for God's attention.

The prayers don't stop at personal concerns. Global missions, community and national issues, and others' needs are all included. One visitor described the experience as reminiscent of a crisis control centre.

Most churches have groups such as this. They're like a backbone or a ribcage: unseen, yet playing a key role in supporting the body of Christ. I don't think our church would have survived some of its crisis times, or enjoyed some of its victories, without the intercession of a handful of these faithful prayer warriors.

Word is getting around that prayer is effective. Neighbours ask the group to pray in times of trouble. The results don't come from any special talent on the part of those gathered to pray. They come from the One who hears the prayers. The women ask in faith, and wait for God to act.

The group has seen God do amazing things. Houses have been bought and sold. People have found work. Church business meetings have gone smoothly. Loved ones have come to the Lord. Lost items have reappeared. Some of the sick have been healed. The families of those who died have been comforted.

God's answers are not always what was expected. Many times they have been "Yes," but at other times, "No." Sometimes the response has been "Not yet." The ladies persevere. These answers to prayer have taught them about God's character. They can trust their Lord to work in the best way, and the best time.

The ladies' prayer meeting is a time of bonding closer with God and with their fellow 'pray-ers'. They are encouraged by hearing another's voice interceding on their behalf, and draw strength from one another and from their sovereign Lord.

Thank God for these little pockets of prayer throughout our country and around the globe. They look like unlikely warriors against the darkness in life, yet they may accomplish more than our corporations and politicians do, because they listen for God's voice and pray for divine intervention in our world.

God is Near

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

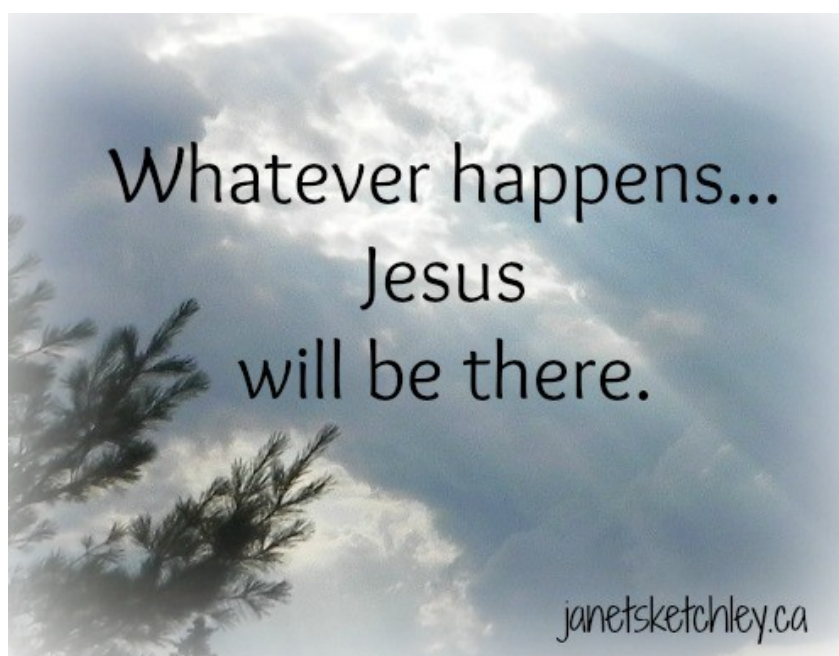
Philippians 4:4-7, NIV

Sometimes intercession feels like a burden instead of a privilege. Maybe the needs start to look bigger than God, or we don't see Him responding, or His answer doesn't match our plans.

It happens to me every so often. A few weeks back, I had some heavy-duty prayer requests on my heart. Mindful of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8, I repeatedly brought them to the Lord “with prayer and petition” but I guess instead of “presenting” them to Him I kept a tight hold.

These verses show me the problem. I'd forgotten the “God is near” part, the “thanksgiving” part. I kept trusting Him in the dark, but there was no peace.

Father, thank You that we can bring everything to You, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and the One who cares for us. Thank You that You are near, and that we can trust You. Thank You for what You will do in and through us, and that we can count on You – not to do what we want, but to work what is best. And oh, I thank You that as we give our burdens to You in confidence, You promise Your peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ.



What's the Key Ingredient of Prayer?

The best part of prayer is the human soul's communion with the Divine Presence, and that usually happens when we stop talking and rest in Him. Listening. Abiding. Worshiping.

Of all the words we offer in prayer, most of them fall into the ACTS categories:

- Adoration
- Confession
- Thanksgiving
- Struggles/Surrender (traditionally Supplication)

All are important, all have their place, and individuals may be called more to one area than the others. We need them all.

But I suspect the single-most important ingredient is adoration.

When we quiet ourselves before God and concentrate on Him—His character, attributes, will, purposes, His activity in our lives—something changes inside us. In the stillness, the peace, we find a gateway into the rest of what we need to say to God and to listening to what *He* has to say to us.

Adoration sets the tone.

God is exalted in our prayer, and this leads to each of the other areas: confession, thanksgiving, and requests for His help. It also strengthens our faith as **we remind ourselves Who this God really is.**

If time is short and I slip into just praying for needs, especially if those needs are overwhelming, I start wearing them like a burden. My perspective skews, and they look even bigger than they are. I lose hope, even while continuing to plead for God's intervention.

Those are more wishes than prayers.

Grounding myself first in God keeps intercession true, because no matter how big the issue, I'm secure in the knowledge that God is bigger and that He has a loving plan. It reminds me that **even when life is tough, God is tougher.**

Expectant Prayer

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee... When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

John 2:1-5, NIV

Mary doesn't ask Him in so many words to do something about it, nor suggest how He solve the problem. She just brings Him the need. She trusts that He not only can but will meet it.

These verses remind me today that simply bringing Jesus the need, in quiet trust that He will want to meet it, is a valid form of prayer.

Whether the Spirit leads us with specifics in prayer, or we bring requests like Mary did here, or whatever the form(s) of prayer we use, let's each be reminded to come in an attitude of expectant trust: He cares, He's interested in our needs, and He has the power to meet them.

Loving God, thank You that You want us to pray: to praise and enjoy You, to confess, to bring needs. Sometimes you show us specific requests to make. Sometimes, like Mary, we simply mention our concern. Help us to always come in an attitude of expectant trust. And we praise You that You care, that You're interested in our needs, and that You have the power to meet them.





About the author:

Janet Sketchley is a Canadian author with a passion for story. She's also a wife, mom, daughter, and friend, balancing relationships and responsibilities while learning how faith applies to real life. Combine all that with her quirky imagination to get inspiring novels about everyday women in suspenseful situations, who discover more strength within than they could have dreamed.

Janet's novel, *Heaven's Prey*, released November 1, 2013 from Choose NOW Publishing. For more information and a free sample chapter, see the *Heaven's Prey* page at her website:

<http://janetsketchley.ca/books/heavens-prey/>

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