

CORE COMPETENCIES

Core Beliefs

- Trinity
- Salvation by Grace
- Authority of Bible
- Personal God
- Identity in Christ
- Church
- Humanity
- Compassion
- Eternity
- Stewardship

Core Practices

- Worship
- Prayer

"I pray to God to know Him, to lay my requests before Him, and to find direction for my daily life."

- Bible Study
- Single-Mindedness
- Biblical Community
- Spiritual Gifts
- Giving Away My Time
- Giving Away My Money
- Giving Away My Faith
- Giving Away My Life

Core Virtues

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness/Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-Control
- Hope
- Humility

Payer is both wonder and mystery, both calling and challenge, both easy as breathing and as difficult as a wrestling match. It's all of that and more. As we enter this week again into the study of God's Word about prayer, we focus on the wrestling and knocking, seeking and asking aspects. Prayer can be hard work—and yet the most important work we'll ever do. I pray that God will spur us on to "come after Him" all the more as we seek His work and His will.

In the battle,

Richard Gotthardt, Pastor of Spiritual Formation

Monday

Sit in silence for a few moments. Begin your time by asking God to teach you through His Word this week.

Read Acts 12:1-17.

The church is enduring great persecution. What does this passage tell us that their response is?

Instead of planning Peter's escape, running away to another city or just sitting around mourning the horrible state of affairs they were facing, the church got to work and prayed. This demonstrated that the place in which they put their trust was not in their own efforts, but in God.

Think of a recent time when you have faced a fearful or difficult circumstance. What was your response to these events? What does this show you about your trust in God?

Reread Acts 12:6-11. This isn't just a fairy tale; these events really happened! List the miracles that God caused to happen in response to the people's prayers.

Close your time in prayer. Thank God for listening to our prayers and responding to us. Ask Him to enlarge your trust in Him and to help you believe that He will answer in more powerful ways than you ever imagined.

Tuesday

What is something for which you have been praying over a long period of time? Bring this request to God again today.

Read Matthew 7:7-11. This passage is part of a teaching that Jesus gave to a large crowd from the side of a mountain, often known as the Sermon on the Mount. Throughout this teaching, He gave many practical lessons on living a holy life.

What three active instructions does He give regarding prayer?

Why do you think that these very similar commands were given one after the other?

These verbs are present tense, indicating they are to be done now and continually throughout our lives. Jesus emphasizes the critical nature of bringing our prayers before God. He already knows what we want and need, but Jesus tells us that we must ask.

What promises are we given about God's response to our prayers?

Think about the prayer that you began with today. How have you continually asked, sought and knocked for an answer to this prayer?

Be encouraged that God is the giver of good gifts. He does not always answer our prayers exactly as we wish, but His response will always be good. Close your time by again asking God for His "good gift" in response to this need or desire.

Wednesday

What is something you have prayed for and after awhile given up because you did not feel God was responding? How did this experience cause you to lose trust in God?

Begin your time by praying these words aloud, "Let me draw near."

Read Hebrews 10:19-22, a call to draw near to God because of Jesus' work on the cross.

We will be taking two days to unpack the richness of these four verses. Reread verses 19-21.

These verses make multiple references to Old Testament worship of God in the temple. Read the following verses that correspond with the Old Testament reference to understand its importance in these verses.

- Most Holy Place: Hebrews 9:1-7; Exodus 26:33-34; Exodus 30:6-10

- "the curtain or veil": Hebrews 9:3; Exodus 26:31-33; Matthew 27:51

What gives us our confidence to enter into God's Presence?

God's Presence formerly dwelt, in the temple, behind a curtain which was torn in two at the time that Jesus died on the cross. Jesus' death began a New Covenant in which we have freedom and confidence to enter into the presence of God. We no longer need a high priest to enter into God's presence and seek forgiveness on our behalf; instead we have the presence of the Holy Spirit with us constantly convicting, leading and guiding us.

Close your time by sitting in silence. Contrast the difference between experiencing God's Presence in Old Testament times versus experiencing His presence now. Thank Him for His New Covenant and for Jesus death that gives us full confidence to come into His presence.

Thursday

Make a short list of recent prayer requests. Examine your motives behind these prayer requests. Do you deeply desire the person and presence of Christ or do you simply want life on your terms? Begin your time by again praying these few words to God— "I am here, draw me near."

Read Hebrews 10:19-22 again today. Yesterday we looked at the basis upon which we can draw near to God; today we will look at how we must approach Him.

Reread verse 22.

We are called to draw near to God and to be characterized by three things:

- a sincere or true heart, fully assured of our faith
- hearts that are cleansed from sin, free of any guilt
- bodies that have been purified of an immorality

Spend a few moments reflecting on each of these characteristics in your own life.

- What makes you fully assured of your own faith in Christ?
- Is your heart cleansed of sin or is there guilt plaguing you?
- Is your body free of any sort of immorality?

Close your time by praying for growth in these characteristics so that you might be able to draw nearer to God.

Friday

Begin your time in a few moments of silence. Ask God to help you focus on His Word during your time today.

Read the following passages: 2 Timothy 1:3, 1 Thessalonians, 3:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

What example/instruction does each of these three passages give?

It may be impossible to verbally pray every moment of every day, but it is not impossible to live a life that is in ongoing conversation with God. As we become more aware of His presence and confident in His character, it will become our first instinct to bring our joys, fears, requests and dreams to Him.

Starting now, take these verses as your assignment to make prayer an ongoing conversation between you and God today. Here are some suggested practices:

- ▶ Turn off your car radio and pray for specific people or situations as they come to mind.
- ▶ Take several predetermined breaks today to stop and look back, noticing God's work in your life over the precious hours. Thank Him for this work.
- ▶ When you feel frustrated or fearful, spend a few moments in prayer before calling any friends or family.
- ▶ When you get exciting news or something good happens, thank God for His goodness.

As you get started on your first day of ongoing prayerful conversation with God, begin with this prayer:

"God, let me draw near to you confident in your presence and goodness. I long to speak to you, notice your work in the world around me and grow in my relationship with you. I have many concerns and requests, but most of all I long for you."

For Group Prayer

ACTS

A Adoration

Leader: O God, the Maker of the sun and moon, the earth and sky, the land and the seas, You are most worthy of praise. Your power is limitless and Your presence is everywhere. You are amazing!

People: Your power is great beyond description yet Your goodness has no end. Your love and kindness pour out on us from heaven, undeserving as we are. Yet we are satisfied by Your mercies which are new each day.

C Confession

Leader: Though Your power is without equal, we have often attempted to take Your place and to play God. We have tried to control outcomes and control people, wanting to have our way.

People: We have often rebelled against Your leadership and defied Your authority. But even though our disobedience is great, Your mercy is even greater. We receive Your grace afresh today, grace which forgives all of our sin.

T Thanksgiving

Leader: We bring to You an offering of thanksgiving, a sincere expression of gratitude. You have given us strength to endure trials and the presence of Your Spirit and of others to encourage and to guide us.

People: In Your great wisdom and kindness, You have answered our prayers. You have answered prayers for help and prayers for peace. You have given relief from burdens and healing from sickness. You are the God who hears our prayers.

S Supplication

Leader: We know that our need is great but that You are more than able. We ask for the grace to endure hardships with patience and the courage to face uncertainty with joy. We ask that You would be strong in our weakness.

People: Help us to trust You for what we cannot understand. When Your ways seem mysterious and Your plans can't be comprehended, help us to trust You. Remind us of Your love and renew us with Your hope.