

She PRAYS

A 31-DAY JOURNEY
TO CONFIDENT
CONVERSATIONS
WITH GOD

DEBBIE LINDELL



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To my grandma Alice
and my mom, Bonnie—
your faith-filled prayers for me
are the thread that wove
these words together.

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Foreword

Several years ago, not long after I'd brought my adopted daughter Missy home from Haiti, we had a precious conversation that changed the topography of my theology regarding prayer. We were lying on a bed together one warm summer afternoon with wildly divergent goals: Missy, who was five years old at the time, was diligently trying to dodge a nap, while I was desperately trying to get her to take one. She employed what has since become a very effective nap- and chore-dodging strategy: she began asking questions about God because she knows that's my hot button.

Here's our conversation as best I remember it:

Missy: Mommy, what do you think God and Jebus are doing in heaven right now?

Me: Well, honey, what do you think God and Jesus are doing in heaven right now? (I responded in

this Socratic manner because several dear friends who had much more parenting experience than I did told me that when your toddler asks a complex question, it's a good idea to pose it back to them!)

Missy: I think they're talking about me!

Me: That's probably true, baby, because the Bible says that Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father and intercedes on our behalf, which means they do talk to each other about us.

Missy: What do you think God and Jebus are saying about me, Mommy?

Me: Hmmmm, what do you think they're saying about you, toots?

Missy (pauses for about thirty seconds before her face splits into a grin): I think Jebus just pointed down at me and said, "*I lub that Missy!*"

In that moment I realized my little girl—who had been orphaned as a baby when her first mama died of undiagnosed AIDS, left starving for both physical and emotional nourishment in a rural third world village afterward, and then given a slim chance of surviving by medical professionals in Port-au-Prince—was actually thriving. And not just physically and emotionally; she was truly thriving in her relationship with God! Plus her understanding of our Lord's affectionate predisposition toward his image bearers was more theologically sound and biblically defensible than mine.

This is why I so appreciate the message of my dear friend Debbie Lindell's newest literary project, *She Prays*. This is not a perky self-help tome for sissy supplicants, y'all. Nor is it a guilt-inducing, humble-brag fest written by some self-appointed saint who gets up at 3:00 a.m. and sequesters herself in a custom prayer closet for hours on end, after which she journals about it in her all-white chef-appointed kitchen while the delicious scents of casseroles she's baking for the needy waft from her shiny, stainless, double convection ovens (not that I'm remotely bitter about spiritual overachievers or anything). Nope, this book is for real women—you know, the ones with French fries littering the floorboards of their minivans, with coffee stains on their Bible studies, and whose kids or grandkids usually have sticky hands and missing homework. These women desperately need to be reminded that they have the full attention and unconditional affection of a real God who actually enjoys hearing from them!

Frankly, I think far too many believers view prayer as an obligatory exercise of spiritual duty and discipline instead of the joy- and awe-filled overflow of a real relationship with God. And to be fair, many of us have been taught the former by well-meaning preachers, teachers, and pundits. Take, for instance, what some refer to as the "how to pray" parable in Luke's Gospel:

And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Luke 11:5–13 ESV

I've often heard this passage explained so as to emphasize the need for diligence in prayer, and I completely agree that persistence in prayer is a good thing. In fact, one of my favorite quotes from John Calvin regarding prayer is, "We must repeat the same supplications not twice or three times only, but as often as we have a need, a hundred and a thousand times. . . . We must never weary in waiting for God's help."¹

However, lest we reduce the joy of communing with our compassionate Creator-Redeemer to a dutiful exercise, I think it behooves us to keep in mind his sovereign benevolence toward us. God is not some supernatural sleepyhead who's reluctant to rouse himself and answer our cries for help, which is the problem with the common single-application interpretation of this parable. Jesus didn't share this story with the Twelve to imply they needed to twist Jehovah's arm to get him to act on their behalf. Rather, the rhetorical device he used (see also Luke 12:25) when he posed the question "How much more" puts the onus squarely on God. So the main point Jesus was driving home to those knuckleheads was much less about our tenacity in prayer and much more about the tenderness of our divine Dad.

Don't forget:

- He is the one who longs to give us good gifts (Matthew 7:11).
- He is the one who inclines his ear to hear us (Psalm 34:15).
- He is the one who initiates and sustains the relationship with us (Romans 5:8).

The bottom line is, this book isn't about God wagging his finger at us in disappointment over our sometimes anemic prayer life. It's about him pointing his finger at us in fatherly pride while declaring affectionately, *"I lub that*

one right there!" I believe the touchstones regarding our Redeemer's compassion, which Debbie has beautifully woven throughout this book, are what will compel all of us to become she who prays!

Lisa Harper, author and Bible teacher

Introduction

I have been praying for you!

The fact that you are holding this book in your hands tells me God is working in your life. Wherever you are in your understanding of prayer, you have more to discover. And my hope and desire is for you to grow deeper in your knowledge of who God is, become more connected to his will, and be more intimately aware of his presence every moment of every day.

You might have picked up this book because you are walking through a difficult season and you very much want to feel closer to God. Maybe you have a longing in your heart to become more confident in your communication with your heavenly Father and you just aren't sure where to begin. Or possibly, like me, you want to know God more intimately and for your conversations with him to be full of faith and connected to his divine will and purpose.

Throughout my years in ministry, women at every level of faith have expressed how they can feel intimidated when it comes to talking to God. They say, “Debbie, I don’t know the words to pray” or “How do I know if God hears me?” One girl recently opened up about her feelings on social media and said, “I’m just terrible at prayer.” That comment broke my heart. Her words revealed that she doesn’t understand how excited her heavenly Father is every time she opens up to him. Somewhere in her past she began to feel pressure to act and even talk a certain way. And because of her insecurities and lack of understanding, she is missing out on the joy, the blessing, and the power found in relational, confident communication with her heavenly Father.

May I just tell you what prayer is not? It is not a religious requirement or a measure of your faithfulness and commitment to God. It is not you saying things perfectly to appease some disconnected deity who doesn’t really care to know you personally. It is not memorizing certain words and repeating them over and over. It is not someone else more “qualified” than you talking and connecting to God on your behalf. Prayer is coming to understand the beauty and fullness of God’s invitation for you to draw near and talk with him personally about everything, like a daughter would—fully trusting her thoughts and emotions to a loving and caring earthly father, without reservation or fear of rejection.

It's one thing to know that we're not gifted at public speaking, playing the violin, or making homemade pumpkin pie, but to believe that we are somehow unqualified or not gifted enough to communicate with our heavenly Father is quite honestly tragic. That's because prayer—in its pure form, apart from the pressures we attach to it—is our personal connection and lifeline to God.

But to be honest, I know exactly what it means to feel insecure when it comes to prayer. The truth is, prayer can be intimidating. To think that we are having a conversation with the most powerful being in the entire universe! The God who spoke all of creation into existence wants to listen to us and respond to us when we talk to him! That is an amazing and sometimes overwhelming thought. But it's true. We have an open invitation, anytime and anywhere, to talk to God. Through prayer, we draw close to God and he draws close to us. In prayer, he reveals his power, his character, his wisdom, his grace, and his amazing love for us. He invites us to partner alongside him in his redemptive work in the world.

No matter at what prayer level you would place yourself, I know God has more for you. His desire is for you to grow in your understanding and confidence regarding your conversations with him—to come to him more boldly and more confidently, believing that when you do, he is there to hear you and respond!

Throughout the next thirty-one days, my hope is to remove the pressures we attach to prayer, throw out the condemning lies we believe about it, and help you discover a faith marked by intimate, confident conversations with God. Each day you'll be invited to unfold the freeing truth about prayer and to open your heart to converse with him in a deeper, more intimate way than ever before.

I cannot tell you how excited I am for you! As you commit to this journey, I am confident that your prayer life will be transformed, that your faith will be strengthened, and that you'll see God move in and through your life in ways you never imagined!

SHE PRAYS *Understand*

A black and white photograph of a person standing against a brick wall, holding a large bouquet of roses that completely obscures their face. The person is wearing a white t-shirt, dark jeans with a distressed look, and dark sneakers with white laces. The bouquet is very full, with many roses of various shades and some greenery.

WITH *ending*

PART ONE

An Open Door

DAY 1

Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven.

REVELATION 4:1

The door opened, and there she stood. Her face shone with joy as she welcomed my family in. The familiar scents of homemade *lefse* and sweet perfume brought me comfort. She was just over five feet tall, but she was a giant to my eight-year-old self. Her weathered Bible was lying open where it always was, on the little wooden table next to her worn floral chair with delicate crocheted doilies gracefully covering its arms. I always had the feeling that we had interrupted a conversation—one she was having with her best friend. And no doubt we were. She had loved and followed Jesus for over

seventy-five years. She knew God. He was her heavenly Father, her friend, her protector, her counselor, her life, and her breath.

Her family had emigrated from Norway to northern Minnesota in 1882, a year before she was born. Life had not been easy for her: she had birthed ten children, lost one, and then sent four of her sons off to war. Her husband had struggled with severe depression, her sons had battled alcohol addiction, and her family endured the Great Depression. Yet through all the trials, her faith had become only stronger and her joy only more evident to all who knew her. How? She lived, breathed, and practiced God's presence, and because of that, his presence filled every part of her life. Her eyes sparkled with faith, hope, and trust. My little heart knew I wanted to be like her when I grew up. This tiny tower of a woman was my great-grandma Tina.

Everything moves. Nothing really stays the same. Grandmothers grow older, possessions become antiques, clocks tick, and time marches on. You? Well, you, my friend, are a little older since you began reading these words. You can't keep anything from changing.

Your prayer life is similar. It is either growing in strength or diminishing in power. If it's stagnant, like a pond without a fresh source of water flowing into it, it will gradually evaporate and become muddy. But God's presence

and supernatural grace bring energy and vitality to your relationship with him like a stream flowing into your prayer life.

We live in a natural world. And if we are not careful to look through our spiritual eyes, it will be easy to think that the natural things are all there is to life. But the supernatural world exists. As a believer and follower of God, you have access to experience, touch, feel, and influence both the natural and spiritual realms.

Our day-to-day existence can seem completely void of the spiritual world. We get up, go to work, run errands, come home. We parent, converse with our spouses, manage our in-boxes, complete to-do lists. Even church can become routine—gray and empty and lifeless.

Pastor and author Simon Holley explains: “God is a supernatural being. He exists beyond and within the natural universe that he has created. This is part of what makes him God. He has created natural laws and properties that control and regulate the universe that we live in. Part of our joy and delight is to study, understand and harness those laws for our benefit and advancement. However, the God who created those laws will not be contained by them. We see this throughout Scripture. From the very first story of God walking with Adam in the cool of the day right through to the final stories of angelic battles in the book of Revelation, it is clear that

God's supernatural realm coexists with the natural realm that he has also created. The problem is we just don't see it."¹

Our difficulty in being aware of the spiritual world isn't that it doesn't exist. The problem is that we don't step through the door of the natural world into all there is for us to experience in the supernatural world.

This past year I was at Disneyland with my family, and my daughter and I chose to visit an attraction together. We waited in a small room for several minutes, not knowing what was on the other side of a door. When the door opened, it revealed a large room with hundreds of seats. We sat down, and minutes later we seemed to be flying above the clouds, taking in spectacular color and brilliant scenery. It was magical and breathtaking, but to experience it, we first had to step through the door.

Your prayer life is the doorway to a place beyond your everyday, feet-on-the-ground life, into a whole new and colorful world.

Your prayer life is the doorway to a place beyond your everyday, feet-on-the-ground life, into a whole new and colorful world. Prayer connects your natural world to the supernatural power and movement of your creator. You were granted access to this whole other world through your faith in Jesus Christ.

All this and more is what the apostle Paul was referring to in Ephesians 3:12 when he wrote, “Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence.” You can go through the door! You have access to the supernatural, all-powerful Creator through prayer.

And just as Paul’s desire was for believers to know and experience all that was beyond the door of the natural world, that is my desire for you. Through these next thirty-one days, I hope your prayer life will grow to another dimension; that your natural, everyday existence will tap into the color and vibrancy and power of the supernatural; and that you, my friend, will be changed forever.

Here is a paraphrase of Paul’s writing in Ephesians 3:14 as I think about you and the exciting journey ahead:

When I think of what God has made available to you, I go to my knees to pray to the Father, the Creator of everything, even your life. I pray that you will come to know and understand what is beyond the door of your natural, everyday life—to believe that through your daily encounters with your creator through prayer, you will be made complete, connecting fully and confidently to the supernatural power available to you in God’s presence.

One time when Jesus was teaching, he said these words to everyone listening: "Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7 GNT). What do you think those words might mean for your prayer life?

Imagine a door in front of you. God is about to open it and invite you inside to experience a deeper relationship with him. How does that make you feel? What would be the first thing you would want to ask him to do for you?
