

Everyday Prayers

365 DAYS
to a Gospel-Centered Faith

SCOTTY
SMITH



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For

Jack and Rose Marie Miller, my spiritual parents,
who taught me more about prayer than anyone else;

Darlene Smith, my beloved wife,
with whom I'd rather pray more than anyone else;

Finley (Finn) Ward Russell, my awesome grandson,
for whom I pray more than anyone else; and

Jesus Christ, our loving Savior,
whose prayers I count on more than anyone else's

Foreword

Tullian Tchividjian

My friend Scotty Smith gets the gospel—really gets the gospel. He’s a grace-soaked, gospel-driven guy. He was, in fact, one of the first to teach me that the gospel is not just for non-Christians. It’s bigger than that; it’s for Christians too.

You see, like many who grew up in church, I once assumed the gospel was simply what non-Christians must believe in order to be saved, and then afterward we advance to deeper theological waters. But Scotty has helped me to realize that once God rescues sinners, his plan is not to steer them beyond the gospel but to move them more deeply into it—that the gospel doesn’t simply ignite the Christian life but is also the fuel that keeps Christians going and growing every day.

In his letter to the Christians of Colossae, the apostle Paul portrays the gospel as the instrument of all continued growth and spiritual progress, even after a believer’s conversion. “The gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world,” he writes, “just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace” (Col. 1:6 NIV). He means that the gospel is not only growing wider in the world but also growing deeper in Christians.

In other words, the gospel represents both the nature of Christian growth and the basis for it. Whatever progress we make in our Christian lives—whatever going onward, whatever pressing forward—the direction will always be deeper into the gospel, not apart from it or aside from it. Growth in the Christian life is the process of receiving Christ’s words

“It is finished” into new and deeper parts of our being. It happens as the Holy Spirit daily carries God’s good word of justification to our regions of unbelief.

Through these daily prayers, Scotty teaches frail, fallen, needy people like me how to preach the gospel to ourselves every day. These are prayers filled with heart and hope. They possess a rare combination of gravity and gladness, depth and delight, doctrine and devotion, precept and passion, truth and love. By God’s grace you will find yourself (as I did) weeping over your sin, celebrating your forgiveness, and exalting in God’s grace. These prayers are intended to make you feel your desperation, cry out for deliverance, and celebrate your pardon.

God used these prayers to sustain me in the most difficult season of my life by reminding me that my relationship to him depends not on my performance for Jesus but on Jesus’ performance for me. I learned that because Jesus was strong for me, I’m free to be weak. Because Jesus won for me, I’m free to lose. These prayers served as a daily reminder to me that only the gospel can cause you to rejoice and be glad in your expendability: because Jesus was someone, you’re *free* to be no one.

I’m thankful to Scotty for mentoring me; for love and friendship; for seasoned insight; and above all, for reorienting me always to the power of the gospel.

Reader, enjoy!

Tullian Tchividjian, senior pastor of Coral Ridge
Presbyterian Church, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida;
author of *Surprised by Grace: God’s Relentless Pursuit of Rebels*

Preface

Everyday Prayers is the book I never intended to write. Though I've been published five previous times, I never would have presumed to write a book on prayer. I know some real prayer warriors, and compared to their prayer life, both in time and in depth, I consider myself a novice and neophyte.

In some ways, *Everyday Prayers* is the book that's been writing me. I never envisioned documenting a whole year's worth of my longings, struggles, and hopes. But that's what I did, along with highlighting a passion to understand and experience more of the gospel of God's grace. The two go hand in hand. The freer we are in acknowledging our messes, the louder our cry will be for God's mercies.

As I began the editing process, I realized it's a good thing I didn't start this project with a book in view. I would have been too self-conscious and audience centered. I would have muted the vulnerability, curbed the spontaneity, and veiled the brokenness reflected in many of these daily entries. I would have been more of a poet and poser and less a thirsty man pouring out his heart to God.

In fact, it's fair to say that spiritual dryness was a main motivation giving birth to these prayers. One of the occupational hazards of vocational ministry is equating doing things *for* Jesus and spending time *with* Jesus. The joy of being used *by* the Lord can mimic the delights of walking closely *with* the Lord, at least for a while. But preaching and applying the gospel to others is not the same thing as preaching and praying it deeper into one's own heart.

The time I invested in Bible study for sermon preparation gradually supplanted time spent marinating in the Scriptures as an act of worship

and transformation. But when it comes to growing in grace, double-dipping simply will not do. I needed to get back to my roots—back to the spiritual discipline of a regular “quiet time.” However, I needed more than just a new routine for reading through the Bible in a year (which, by the way, is a great thing to do). I wanted a format that would help me accomplish three things.

First, I wanted to be more intentional about looking for Jesus in every part of the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation. I wanted to discover, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets . . . what was said in all the Scriptures” about Jesus (Luke 24:27 NIV). And since all of God’s promises find their “yes” in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20), I wanted to pray those promises with my eyes fixed on the Savior and *his* purposes. God’s promises claim us a whole lot more than we claim them.

Second, I wanted a format that would make it easy for me to hear and apply the gospel to my heart on a daily basis. This is a practice I gained from Jack Miller, my seminary professor who became a spiritual father for twenty-one years. Jack taught me that the best way to preach the gospel to others is to first preach it to yourself. He also taught me that there’s nothing more *than* the gospel, just more *of* the gospel. We are incessantly to mine the unsearchable riches of Jesus. We do this best, Jack believed, through Bible study and prayer.

Third, I wanted to include an element of journaling in my devotional life—a discipline I’ve always encouraged others to practice, but one I’d never taken very seriously for myself. I have friends who’ve kept prayer journals for years, some for decades. I now understand the benefit of chronicling our stories and cries and God’s mercies and faithfulness.

So one morning I simply started my day a little earlier than normal, opened the Scriptures, turned on my laptop, and began praying through a few of my favorite verses. Writing my words as I prayed forced me into a slower pace and helped my concentration tremendously, as I am highly distractible. A few weeks into this journey, a new discipline had become an important delight.

I began to share select prayers with friends who were going through some of the same heartaches and difficulties as I. Requests came for permission to pass certain prayers to others. Before long, members of our church family started asking about my prayer devotionals. I started a small email distribution list, which has grown to hundreds of people around the country. Then, at the encouragement of Scott Roley, my best friend and successor as senior pastor, I started posting the prayers as a blog at our church’s website, and later on Facebook and on the website of The Gospel Coalition.

The blog became somewhat of a tutorial for gospel praying—an environment for helping members of our church and online community learn how to think the gospel, pray the gospel, and apply the gospel to all sorts of situations. Many members of our church family come from moralistic and legalistic Christian backgrounds. These performance-based spiritualities make it easy to read the Bible as a book of pragmatic rules or formulas for successful living. So discovering Jesus to be the main character in the Bible is new and transforming to a lot of people.

My format remains the same to this day: I begin each day asking Jesus to lead me to a portion of Scripture that speaks to our real and felt needs. When I land on a manageable portion of the Word, I meditate on that Scripture and then pray through it, wearing the “lens of the gospel.” I simply write as I pray, trying very hard not to teach under the guise of praying. Some days I feel I do a better job of this than other days.

I try to be sensitive to particular things going on in my heart, in relationships all around me, in the church, in the culture, in our nation, and in our world. I try to strike a balance with all of these, because the gospel speaks to every area of our lives—personal and corporate, local and global, spiritual and cosmic. You will also notice that I interchange personal and plural pronouns. Though the gospel is personal, it is not private. God’s grace frees us to be quite specific with things going on in our lives, but it also compels us into deeper community with others. This individual and corporate prayer rhythm is most clearly seen in the book of Psalms.

Praying the gospel involves engaging with all three offices of Christ: Jesus as prophet, priest, and king. Engaging him *as our prophet*, we listen to Jesus and we look for him in every part of the Scriptures (Luke 24:27). Engaging him *as our priest*, we honor Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for our sins, the righteousness we have by faith, and our loving Savior and High Priest who meets and greets us at the throne of his grace. Engaging him *as our king*, we submit to Jesus as the one who is making all things new—including us and the broken world all around us.

Praying the gospel involves “redemptive redundancies.” I intentionally always come back to who we are in Christ and who he is in us. Like Luther said, we need the basics of the gospel every day because we forget the gospel every day.

Praying the gospel also involves connecting with the grand metanarrative of the Bible, which runs through and connects all sixty-six books. This redemptive-historical way of praying helps us remember our calling to be characters in and carriers of God’s story. God’s story unfolds through the fourfold plotline of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.

Keeping this big story line in mind helps us consistently focus on the person and work of Jesus.

Indeed, the central and operative question in life is not “What would Jesus do if he were here?” Rather, it is “What is Jesus doing?” since he is right here, and everywhere else, right now. The two things that Jesus has “signed on for”—the two things that are central to the history of redemption and echo through every one of these prayers—are his commitment to redeem his bride from every nation and his commitment to restore creation and usher in the new heaven and new earth at his return. These two passions of Jesus are assumed in every one of my prayers.

So *Everyday Prayers* is a whole year’s worth of groaning and growing in grace—365 prayers that reflect a lot of gospel lived through a lot of stories and circumstances, joys and sorrows, theological propositions and ongoing questions. I prayed my way through Lent and Advent and in response to other events of pain and joy.

Some of the prayers are poetic, perhaps suffering from preacher-speak and alliteration. Some are raw with confession and longing. Some of the prayers are born of specific crises: the 2010 Nashville flood, the crisis in Haiti, the death of an orca trainer in Orlando—story lines that show believers how to pray the gospel in response to all kinds of hard providences.

Some of the prayers are as broad as heaven, and some are as detailed as gratitude for the smell of baking bread or the taste of chocolate. Some of the prayers are esoteric, demonstrating how to pray the gospel when you bury your ninety-one-year-old, Alzheimer’s-stricken father or your beloved sixteen-year-old Yorkie. Some of the prayers are born out of the struggles of specific friends, modeling how we bring our friends to Jesus.

My hope is that *Everyday Prayers* will simply help you, in some small way, to come more fully alive to Jesus on a daily basis and to see how his gospel is “bearing fruit and growing” (Col. 1:6) all over the world and in every sphere of life. “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15 NIV)!

A Prayer about the New Year and the Gospel

Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Josh. 24:14–15)

Gracious Father, as I sit here sipping fresh coffee and watching flames dance in the fireplace, it's early into the first day of a new year. Tons of confetti cover the streets of Manhattan, and gratitude fills my heart.

I'm thankful I'm beginning this year with a little better understanding of the gospel than I had last year and the previous years. I'm already praying that I'll be able to say the same thing this time next year. For the gospel is not just good news for people getting ready to die—it's good news for people who are now ready to live.

In the gospel you lavish us with your love, liberate us by your grace, and launch us into your transforming story of redemption. What more could we possibly want or hope for, in life or in death?

Because the gospel is true, I don't respond to Joshua's bold charge with a list of New Year's resolutions—promises of what I'm going to do for you. Rather, I begin this year resolving to abandon myself to everything Jesus has done for us. Jesus is the promise keeper, not us. He's the one who has promised to make all things new, including me.

Father, that's why serving you is much more than merely "desirable"; it's the greatest privilege conceivable and the purest delight imaginable. For Jesus is our Joshua—the one who has saved us, is saving us, and one day will completely save us. Without any embarrassment or fear of cliché, I gladly affirm: Jesus saves! What other savior died for us that we might find life in him? What other god sacrificially serves us that we might gratefully serve him?

Because of the gospel, throwing away my idols feels less like a painful sacrifice and more like a liberating dance. For all my "empty nothings" have ever given me is momentary pleasure and lasting regrets. Remind me of this all year long when I'm tempted to think otherwise.

Father, may this be a year of considering our lives worth nothing to us, if only we may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given us—the task of testifying (by word and deed) to the gospel of your grace (Acts 20:24). In Jesus' loving name we pray, with great anticipation and much thanksgiving. Amen.

A Prayer about “Blessing” God

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24–25 NIV)

Heavenly Father, while many clamor about and try to “claim” more blessings from you, may this be a year in which we come alive to the multiplied blessings you’ve already lavished upon us in the gospel. Already you have rescued us from the dominion of darkness and have placed us in the kingdom of your beloved Son, Jesus (Col. 1:13). Already you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Already we are completely loved by you because of Jesus’ completed work on our behalf. As the year progresses, open the eyes of our hearts to see all these glorious riches more clearly and enjoy them more fully (Eph. 1:18–19).

All year long you’ll prove your covenant and capacity to keep us from falling. Though we may falter in the journey, the grasp of your grace is steady and secure. When we waver in our adoration of you, you will remain constant in your affection for us. When we are faithless and disobedient, you will remain committed and fully engaged with us. Even when you must discipline us this year, it will be in love, never in disgust or regret that you have adopted us (Heb. 12:7–12). We praise you for being the perfect Father to your daughters and sons.

All year long you’ll be at work preparing us for the day when we come into your glorious presence. We’re confident and grateful as we face that day, because you have promised to complete the good work of the gospel you’ve begun in us (Phil. 1:6). Indeed, Father, if this should be the year in which you call me “home,” herein lies my humble confidence: I will stand before you without fault because you’ve placed me in the faultless Righteous One, Jesus.

Our hope is built on nothing less, nothing more, and nothing other than Jesus’ blood and his righteousness. Jesus is the only reason we can be sure we’ll stand before you with great joy. Your joy is our strength (Neh. 8:10). Because of your great delight in us, we find great delight in you. Because you rejoice over us with singing, we will sing the new song of the gospel forever (Zeph. 3:14–17).

Gracious Father, you are the only God, the only Savior—to you “be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!” (Jude 25 NIV). In Jesus’ merciful and matchless name we pray. Amen.

A Prayer about Our Called and Shared Life in Christ

To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1 Pet. 1:1–2 NIV)

Gracious Father, we praise you for the gift of community. It's a tremendous joy to begin this New Year together as brothers and sisters in Christ—adopted by your grace, shaped by the gospel, and indwelt by the Spirit. Bring much glory to yourself as you transform us and liberate us for your redeeming purposes.

May this be a year in which we reengage with our corporate calling as your beloved people. We're your *family*, not just your individual sons and daughters. Our selfishness and the busyness and drivenness of our culture conspire to make it easy for us to think only of ourselves. But the gospel contradicts all such isolated and independent living.

You chose *us* by your foreknowledge, redeemed *us* by your Son, and set *us* apart by your Spirit to demonstrate the reconciling and redeeming power of the gospel in cities and among the nations of the world. Indeed, you've called us to live as strangers in this world, not as strange people. If there's to be anything offensive about us, may it only be the gospel of your grace.

Renew our churches and help us plant new churches that make the gospel beautiful and believable. May we live as good citizens of heaven *and* the cities where you've placed us. May our neighbors be glad we are among them. Help us to offer a meaningful glimpse of the future we share because the gospel is true.

Lord Jesus, it's only because you were obedient to death—even death upon the cross—that we can offer back an obedience of grateful faith. Live and love, in us and through us, all year long to your glory. Be magnified in our hearts, revealed in our cities, and revered among the nations of the world. We pray with great anticipation, in your most worthy name. Amen.

A Prayer about Our Wanderings and God's Mercies

Remember my affliction and my wandering,
the wormwood and the gall!
My soul continually remembers it
and is bowed down within me.
But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.” (Lam. 3:19–24)

Loving Father, another day and another fresh batch of your mercies greet us, even before sunrise. We join Jeremiah in calling to mind your great love and your great faithfulness. In fact, we can “call to mind” much more of your love and faithfulness than Jeremiah. Our place in the history of redemption is to be much preferred over his.

Jeremiah lived looking forward to the coming of Jesus and the fulfillment of the promises of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34). But we live on *this side* of those blessed events. How much quicker should I be to praise you and how much greater should my hope be!

Lord Jesus, you're the reason I'm not consumed with guilt and paralyzed with fear. Because of you, God has forgiven *all* my wickedness and will *never* remember my sins against me (Jer. 31:34). You became sin for me, and in you I have received the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). Thus I look at you and loudly proclaim, “The LORD Our Righteous Savior” (Jer. 33:16 NIV)—the Lord, *my* righteousness!

Father, it's because of this gospel, this good news, that I also join Jeremiah in lamenting my wanderings. With humility I still sing, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.” Oh, how I need the gospel every day and every hour.

Don't let me wander far. When I lose sight of Jesus, make the gall *more galling*, make the bitterness *more bitter*, make downcast feel even *more downcast*. I don't want to ever get used to feeling disconnected from the gospel.

In view of your steadfast love and never-failing compassions, I proclaim, “The LORD is *my* portion” (Lam. 3:24). I *will* wait for you, my God. I pray in Jesus' powerful and tender name. Amen.

A Prayer about Flabby Hearts and Love Handles

It is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace. (Heb. 13:9)

While bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.
(1 Tim. 4:8)

Dear Father, the health clubs and fitness centers are packed with postholiday traffic. Yesterday I had to wait twenty minutes before I could even get onto my favorite elliptical machine. Once again, scores of us seem ready to leave the sugar/butter/carbohydrate binge of the past six weeks for the purge of exercise and sweat. This is a good thing, for stewardship of our physical hearts and bodies does have value, and it does bring you glory.

Yet I've never been more aware that spiritual formation based on the "binge and purge" cycle simply doesn't work. Our spiritual hearts need to be strengthened by the grace of the gospel daily, all year long. We cannot afford periods of "cruise control," when we leave the banquet of your love for a buffet of comfort foods, fast foods, and junk foods. Just like the physical hearts you've given us, our spiritual heart muscles will atrophy if we don't take care of them.

So I thank you for the "means of grace"—the good gifts you've freely given us to help us grow in grace and the knowledge of Jesus. Thank you for the Bible, your written Word, through which you reveal yourself and feed us with the riches of the gospel. Thank you for prayer, meditation, and corporate worship, by which you meet and fellowship with us. Thank you for the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, these tangible expressions of your covenant love and grace.

Father, you won't love us more or less based on our use of these good gifts. But we certainly demonstrate and deepen our love for you as we do so. By the convicting work of your Holy Spirit, let us be far more concerned about flabby, graceless hearts than bigger love handles. Because you love us, don't let us get used to being spiritually lazy. May we come to the point where we'd sooner avoid oxygen and water than the means of grace. Certainly gospel sanity is to be preferred over personal vanity, all the time. We offer our prayer in Jesus' loving and faithful name. Amen.

A Prayer about Resetting My Heart on Jesus

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:1–4)

Gracious Jesus, I don't think I've ever praised you for a phone with GPS before today. But as someone born with neither an internal compass nor a gyroscope, someone who labors to find his parked car, someone who walks out of a hotel room not remembering if the elevator is to the right or the left . . . I give you praise for the good gifts of modern technology.

Jesus, in a far more profound way, I'm praising you this morning for the Scriptures, for they are constantly redirecting my wandering heart to its true destination. And I'm praising you for the gospel, for the gospel is not only my GPS but the car that gets me home. Indeed, Jesus, I'm resetting my heart on *you* this morning.

You are my destination and my delight. By God's grace, your death is considered to be mine. When you died on the cross, God punished you for all *my* sins. When you were raised from the dead, I was raised with you and was given a whole new life and story.

Right now my life is safely hidden in you, for God has placed me in union with you, Jesus. I'm covered with your righteousness, completely forgiven and acceptable to God, and very much loved by him. I'm destined to become as lovely and as loving as you and to reign with your whole bride in the new heaven and new earth. There's no other story I'd rather be in—and yet, until the day you return, I'll be tempted to think otherwise.

No one and nothing else is worthy of my heart's adoration, affection, and allegiance—only you, though good things and bad things claim otherwise. I set my heart on you today, Jesus, as my ultimate good. Not on my reputation, my children, my marriage, my stuff, my job. Not on my desire to get even, to get out, to be liked, to be happy, to be in control, to be safe.

Jesus, you've done everything *for me*, and now I trust you to do everything *in me* that will bring you glory. In your matchless name I pray. Amen.

A Prayer about Not Being Idle about Idols

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21 NIV)

Dear Father, in Rome I've seen statues of the various gods that filled the temples and lifestyle of that great ancient city. In London I visited the biggest Hindu temple in the city and wandered from station to station as worshipers offered prayers and gifts to deities that looked so strange to me. In Israel I studied decaying remains of various idols that competed for the worship of the people of God. Idolatry is everywhere because there's no such thing as a nonworshiper.

Yet for me to obey John's command to keep myself from idols requires so much more than simply staying away from ancient sites, pagan temples, and man-made idols. Father, I've never been more aware of the invisible pantheon of idols that are constantly angling and clamoring for my heart's worship. How I wish that as soon as you placed me in Christ my struggle with idolatry would have ceased. That's simply not the case, or this Scripture would be entirely irrelevant.

Sometimes the approval or rejection of people has more sway over my heart than what you think about me. Sometimes my need to be right is more compelling to me than being righteous in Christ. Sometimes my desire to be in control of people and circumstances claims much more of my time and energy than seeking your face, savoring your grace, and serving your Son—the true King. These are just a few of the things that bear the marks of idolatry in my heart.

Have mercy on me, Father, and free my foolish heart from giving anything or anyone the attention, allegiance, affection, and adoration you alone deserve. The fact that I'm one of your "dear children"—forgiven, secure, righteous, and beloved in Christ—should be all the motivation I need to keep myself from *any* form of idolatry. May the gospel of your grace relentlessly expose and dethrone all "empty nothings" from my heart. I pray in Jesus' most worthy name. Amen.

A Prayer about God as Abba Father, Not Sugar Daddy

Then Satan answered the LORD and said,
“Does Job fear God for no reason?” (Job 1:9)

There are many who say, “Who will show us some good?
Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!”
You have put more joy in my heart
than they have when their grain and wine abound.
In peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety. (Ps. 4:6–8)

Heavenly Father, today we want to affirm that nothing has to change for us to know your joy—neither people nor circumstances. We don’t love you simply because you make us happy. We reject Satan’s assumption that the only reason we, your children, love you is because you buy our affections with “the good life” (Job 1:9–11).

I never saw a carbohydrate (grain) I didn’t like, and I enjoy a glass of good red wine as much as anyone, but my love for you does not depend upon you being a 24/7 convenience store for me. Your name is Abba Father, not Sugar Daddy.

I love you because you bought me back—you redeemed my life from sin and death by the perfect life of Jesus. I love you because you first loved me and gave Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement and propitiation for my sins. I enjoy the many creature comforts you give me, but I love you in response to your great love lavished on me in the gospel.

Though many are asking, “Who can show us any good? Where is your God now? How can you say God is good? Where was your God when . . . ? How could your God possibly . . . ? Why doesn’t your God . . . ?” yet, Lord, I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Father, there’s no safer place to be—in life or in death—than in Christ. Because you’ve hidden our lives in Jesus, not a hair can fall from our heads, not a breath can be taken from our lungs, and not a beat can be missed by our hearts apart from your sovereign purposes and pleasure. And should I die in the next hour, my heart will forever proclaim, “My God has done all things well.” I pray with great gratitude, in Jesus’ most worthy name. Amen.

A Prayer Warning of Cooling Affections for God

And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:12–14)

Jesus, it is pipe-freezing-cold outside this morning, and it's supposed to get even colder. One of my first concerns today is for the poor and elderly in our community—those whose homes are not insulated and heated well enough to withstand this kind of extreme cold. I pray for their safety, but I also realize that loving you involves putting legs on my prayers. To whom would you send me today, in my neighborhood or in my city? Whom should I call and check on?

A concern for the poor is closely connected to your sobering words I just read in Matthew—words warning about the danger of our love growing cold. That's a frightful thought, Jesus. I take it seriously, especially as I take stock of my heart relationship with you. When our affections for you chill, then our concern and compassion for others diminishes as well. What a tragic domino effect. What a disgrace.

May I never stop singing the last line in the hymn “O Sacred Head Now Wounded”: “Should I fainting be, Lord, let me never, never outlive my love for thee.” That's my earnest, impassioned prayer, Jesus. I don't fear losing my salvation. I will stand firm to the end because of my standing in grace. But what could be worse than for my love for you to cool down, degree by degree, as I get older? Don't let that happen to me, Jesus. Don't let that happen. What could be worse than to finish the race with an ingrown, icy heart?

I do not and will not trust in my love for you, but only in your love for me. I love you, Jesus, because you first loved me and gave yourself as a sacrifice of atonement—as a judgment-exhausting propitiation for my sins. And now it is impossible for you to love me more than you do right now, and you are committed to never loving me less. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Holy Spirit, breathe upon the embers of my heart and rekindle the love I first had for Jesus when the gospel of grace was first applied to my heart, when nothing else mattered. Come, Holy Spirit, come in fire and power. Preach the gospel to my heart today—right now, as though it were the very first time. I pray expectantly, in Jesus' kind and powerful name. Amen.

A Prayer about the Day Mountains Will Sing

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth:
 it will not return to me empty,
 but it will accomplish that which I purpose,
 and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
 For you shall go out in joy
 and be led forth in peace;
 the mountains and the hills before you
 shall break forth into singing,
 and all the trees of the field
 shall clap their hands. (Isa. 55:11–12)

Gracious Father, you know how much I love mountains of all shapes and sizes. There's just something about mountains that causes my heart to feel the greatness of your glory and grace—the weightiness of your majesty and the endlessness of your mercy. What a Creator! What a creation!

I guess it started with Boy Scout trips to the hills of western North Carolina, then on to exploring the Blue Ridge Mountains around Boone and Banner Elk, North Carolina. And I'll never forget my first sighting of the Rocky Mountains in Estes Park, Colorado—the shimmering aspen leaves against the rich blue of a humidity- and haze-free fall skyline!

But then there was the day I stepped off the train in the village of Interlaken, Switzerland, and got hammered with the holy wonder of three Alps: the Eiger, the Mönch, and the Jungfrau. I can still see, smell, feel, and taste the sensual overload of that day. Indeed, Father, the works of your hands declare your glory, loud and clear. How can I keep from singing your praise?

But, Father, these words of Isaiah envision a day when the mountains themselves will burst into song—the new song of the new creation. Though your glory is clearly revealed in the beauty of your creation, it is revealed *ten thousand times more in the redemption that you freely give us in Jesus*. Jesus is the Alps of your mercy, grace, and love for us!

Because of Jesus, we, your redeemed people, will go out in joy and be led forth into peace, into shalom—the perfect order, society, environment, and world of the new heaven and new earth. You have spoken, you have promised, and *so shall it be!* Your Word will accomplish everything you decree and all your delights. With great hope we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

A Prayer about Gospel Parenting

Unless the LORD builds the house,
 Those who build it labor in vain.
 Unless the LORD watches over the city,
 the watchman stays awake in vain.
 It is in vain that you rise up early
 and go late to rest,
 eating the bread of anxious toil;
 for he gives to his beloved sleep.
 Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
 the fruit of the womb a reward. (Ps. 127:1–3)

Heavenly Father, it's a joy to address you today as the architect and builder of your own house—including the household of faith and my children's place in your family.

As I look back over the years of my pragmatic parenting, I'm saddened, but I am also gladdened, for you've always been faithful to your covenant love, even when I was overbearing and underbelieving. The move from parenting by grit to parenting by grace has been a fitful but fruitful journey. Take me deeper; take me further.

You've rescued me from parental "laboring in vain"—assuming a burden you never intended parents to bear. Father, only you can reveal the glory and grace of Jesus to our children. Only you can give *anyone* a new heart. You've called us to parent as an act of worship—to parent "as unto you," not as a way of saving face, making a name for ourselves, or proving our worthiness of your love.

Oh, the arrogant pride of thinking that by my "good parenting" I can take credit for what you alone have graciously done in the lives of my children. Oh, the arrogant unbelief of assuming that by my "bad parenting" I've forever limited what you will be able to accomplish in the future. Oh, the undue pressure our children must feel when we parent more out of our fear and pride than by your love and grace.

Since our children and grandchildren are *your* inheritance, Father, teach us—teach me—how to care for them as humble stewards, not as anxious owners. More than anything else, show us how to parent and grandparent in a way that best reveals the unsearchable riches of Jesus in the gospel. Give us quick repentances and observable kindnesses. Convict me quickly and surely when I do not relate to your covenant children "in line with the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:14 NIV). I pray in Jesus' faithful name. Amen.

A Prayer for Engaging in Gospel Warfare

For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:22–25)

Jesus, though I'm conflict avoidant by nature and choice, this is one conflict about which I am actually excited. The very fact that there's a war going on inside of me is a *good thing*, especially since the combatants are the gospel and my sinful nature. For this means that the outcome of this war has already been decided. The gospel will prevail! Yet I'm not naïve about the “mop-up” operation. Growing in grace is great, but it sure gets messy and intense.

The only reason I now delight in God's law, in my heart of hearts, is because the demands of the law drove me to you, Jesus. I needed a substitute and a Savior, not a model and a coach. You perfectly met all the requirements of God's law for me, and you've exhausted his judgment against all my law breaking. This is the good news, indeed.

The messy part of knowing you comes from your commitment to make me like yourself. You're more committed to getting “heaven” in me than getting me into heaven. Why couldn't you have just glorified me after justifying me? It would've been so much easier. Why couldn't we have just skipped over the whole sanctification process?

Silly questions, indeed. I'm just very thankful to know that one day I will be as loving and as lovely as you, for the Father will complete his work in each of his children, including me. Until that day, here's my prayer . . .

Jesus, allow me to grieve the sinfulness of sin—the sinfulness of my sins. Now that I'm no longer guilty or condemned, let me fearlessly see my sins, ruthlessly hate my sins, and relentlessly repent of my sins. Increase my love for holiness and decrease my self-contempt. Only the gospel can bring me such freedom. Only by seeing more of you, Jesus, will I delight in this journey.

Jesus, *you're* the end of all my wretchedness. *You're* the one who's rescuing me from this “body of death”—all the effects and residue of the fall, all the trappings of my graveclothes, every semblance of every way I'm not like you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. I pray in your most powerful and loving name. Amen.

A Prayer about Not Fretting Evil

Be still before the LORD
 and wait patiently for him;
 do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
 when they carry out their wicked schemes.
 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
 do not fret—it leads only to evil.
 For those who are evil will be destroyed,
 but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.
 (Ps. 37:7–9 NIV)

Faithful Father, you send your Word with Swiss timing and uncanny precision. Whenever I'm vexed or fretful, you anticipate it. Whenever I'm confused or anxious, you've already spoken wisdom about the matter in multiple places in the Scriptures. Whenever I feel vulnerable or angry, you come to me in the Bible and bring me back to gospel sanity, time and time again. How I praise you for the counsel and consolation of your Word.

Today, Father, I'm a bit worked up over the apparent success of those who bring harm to others and even get rewarded for their madness. Whether it's in the global reach of terrorism, the ongoing shenanigans of Wall Street, the seizing of aid marked for poor countries, or even the self-indulgent world of sports and athletics, violations of beauty and goodness are everywhere. How long, O Lord, before you send Jesus back to put all things right?

Your answer to me today in this Scripture is just what I need. You won't give me a date, but as always, you do give me yourself. I hear you loud and clear, Father. You're speaking stillness and fretless waiting to my heart. No good comes from my obsessing about evil and evil-making. Nothing profitable results from my spending extra time fertilizing my anger and fueling my disgust.

A day is coming when the knowledge of your glory will cover the entire earth as the waters cover the sea. The whole world, not just one small and important bit of real estate in the Middle East, is holy land. The New Jerusalem is coming down from heaven, not a day early and not a day late.

Until that day, I will *seek to seek first* the kingdom of God and the righteousness of King Jesus. How I praise you that the very righteousness with which you have already robed me is the very righteousness with which you are going to fill the earth. You've already made me both your son and an heir of the new heaven and new earth! Hallelujah, what a Savior! Hallelujah, what a salvation! I pray in Jesus' powerful name. Amen.

A Prayer for Preaching the Gospel to Yourself

I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” (Rom. 1:15–17)

Dear Jesus, even as Paul was eager to preach the gospel to believers in Rome, so I’m eager to preach it to my own heart today. There was a time when I thought the gospel was only for nonbelievers—simply the doorway for beginning a relationship with you. I now realize the gospel is just as much for believers as it is for nonbelievers, because from beginning to end, our salvation is entirely dependent upon the grace, truth, and power of the gospel.

Salvation is not just about going to heaven when we die. It’s about becoming like you, Jesus—being transformed into your likeness. Only the resources of the gospel are sufficient for such a task, for we’re not just separated from God by a great distance, we are thoroughly broken and corrupted by sin. We need a big gospel for our great need. Indeed, there’s nothing more than the gospel, there is just more of the gospel.

So I praise you today, Jesus, that you’ve already accomplished everything necessary to completely save us. You came into the world as God’s promised Messiah. You lived a life of perfect obedience on our behalf—as our substitute, fulfilling all the demands of God’s law for us. You died upon the cross for us—taking the judgment we deserve, completely exhausting God’s righteous anger against our sin. Hallelujah!

Through faith in you and this good news, all of my sins have been forgiven and I’ve been given the gift of your perfect righteousness. God has already declared me righteous in his sight. He cannot love me more than he does today, and he’ll never love me less. In fact, because of your work for me, Jesus, God now loves me just as much as he loves you, for he’s hidden my life in yours. Amazing!

He’s adopted me as his child and placed his Spirit in my heart. The Holy Spirit constantly reminds me I’m God’s beloved child, because I’m so prone to forget. He’s also present in my life to make me like you, Jesus, for I can no more change myself than I could’ve ever begun a relationship with God on my own. Keep pressing this gospel into my heart, I pray in your priceless and peerless name. Amen.

A Prayer about Jesus’ Shameless Love for Us

Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says, “I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.” And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again he says, “Here am I, and the children God has given me.” (Heb. 2:11–13 NIV)

Dear Jesus, I’ve thought, said, and done a lot of things in my life of which I am truly ashamed. I’ve been painfully shamed and I’ve shamed people I dearly love. Shame is a pillaging thief, one that robs us of dignity, freedom, and joy.

So when I hear you tell me that you’re *not* ashamed of me—that you’re not ashamed to call me your brother—it humbles and gladdens me like nothing else.

You’re the only answer for the paralyzing power of shame, Lord Jesus. How I praise you for doing everything necessary to deal with the ways I’ve been both an agent and a victim of sin—sin that has led to multiple layers of shame. You’re the only one who can make me holy, the only one who can “set me apart” for the redeeming and restoring purposes of the one I now know as Abba, Father.

In fact, I only dare cry out “Abba, Father” because you first cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps. 22:1). You took the full guilt and the real shame of my sin on the cross. I really do believe this. I really want to experience it more fully.

And now you sing to me of the Father’s love. You declare his praises to my heart every time I hear the gospel, every time I gather with my brothers and sisters to worship the Triune God, every time I take the bread and cup of Holy Communion, every time I read the Scriptures, every time I listen to your voice in creation proclaiming the majesty and mercy of God.

Jesus, you’re *not* ashamed of me. This is the theology I defend; make it the doxology in which I delight. I pray in your most compassionate name. Amen.

A Prayer for Seeing with Gospel Eyes

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

(1 Sam. 16:7 NIV)

Loving Father, I’ve worn prescription glasses since high school, moving from regular to progressive focus lenses over the course of years. Recently I’ve had laser surgery to help me see more precisely than ever. Yet there’s an ophthalmological corrective that can *only* take place as the gospel does its work on the eyes of my heart.

Even if I could see with 20/15 or 20/10 vision, if I’m only focusing on the “outward appearance” of people and things, I’m still not seeing as you intend. My plea? Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, so that I may see Jesus—and as I begin seeing Jesus more clearly, help me see everything else from *his* perspective.

Help me to see people with gospel eyes. Father, when I’m only looking at people with the aberrations of a fallen heart, show me what true beauty consists of. When I only see the things in people that irritate or inconvenience me, help me to see their dignity, their brokenness, and *your* image in them. When I only see people in terms of how they might harm or help me, expand my vision beyond my story to your larger story of redemption and restoration. Help me to see what *you* see in my spouse . . . in my children . . . in my friends . . . even in total strangers.

Help me to see creation with gospel eyes. Father, don’t let me look at the ocean, mountains, stars, sunrises and sunsets, flora and fauna, or even weather patterns just in terms of me and my plans. As you open and heal the eyes of my heart, enable me to live more as a worshipful steward of your creation and less as a selfish consumer of your creation.

Help me to see pain and suffering with gospel eyes. Father, sometimes looking at all the crucibles, crises, and cruel stories of life makes me want to run, hide, fix, or deny. Help me to see with the eyes of Jesus when overwhelming need is staring me down. I pray in Jesus’ healing name. Amen.