

Brooke McGlothlin

Cofounder of Million Praying Moms

PRAYING MOM



PRAYING MOM

Making Prayer the First and
Best Response to Motherhood



Brooke McGlothlin



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To Jamie, Meg, Erin, and Angie—the Groupies

God gave us each other in a season
when I desperately needed women who would love me
even if they didn't understand me.

You have been the hands and feet of Jesus to me
and my children so many times over the years and,
more than anyone except Cory, have watched me try to
follow the Lord in becoming a praying mom.

I love each of you so much.

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Foreword

I remember my first lengthy conversation with Brooke. She had asked to meet me at a Cracker Barrel to discuss homeschooling, as she was considering it and I had been doing it for a year or so. Before that day, we had exchanged hellos and small talk at church, but I didn't really know her. I don't remember all the details of that conversation, but I do remember the intensity with which she spoke. I had no doubt that this woman could do whatever God called her to do. It was the first time I witnessed her fierce love for her boys.

A few years later, I was fortunate to have Brooke and her husband join our life group. She was quiet at first, but as a fellow introvert, I didn't take it personally. When she did begin to open up, she shared with us wisdom that was beyond her years and a passion for walking with the Lord, and I soon got to know Brooke's heart. As our friendship deepened, we talked about everything and anything—the good, the bad, and even the ugly. I sought her out for advice and, even more so, I sought her for prayer.

Brooke is a mighty prayer warrior. If she says she is going to pray for you, she will. This woman doesn't just talk the talk;

she walks the walk. She prays the prayers. She believes God will answer.

I have trouble remembering what I did earlier today, but I remember much of what Brooke has shared through prayer. She pours out her heart when she prays, and it's a beautiful thing to experience. I have witnessed her praying for many things over the past decade, but perhaps her most passionate prayers concern her children. I have seen her, when at the end of her rope, turn to the Lord and simply wait. I have seen her cover her boys in prayer at times when, to be honest, I wouldn't have thought about praying for my children.

One hot summer day we were sitting at a crowded pool. It had become one of our most common places to sit and talk. Something had happened in the pool between her younger son and another boy. I listened as she talked her son through it. Then I listened to her pray for him and for the other boy. Her praying didn't surprise me in the least, but I couldn't help but notice how her little boy snuggled into her, closed his eyes, and listened. He didn't pull away so he could get back in the water, or stare off in the distance, not really listening. I have no doubt it was because that's who Brooke is: She parents with prayer.

I have had many opportunities to pray with Brooke and have her pray over me and my family. When she doesn't know what to pray, she simply gives it to God and trusts that He will do what is best. I've also watched her go through painful times of loss and struggle. Whether it was financial, relational, grief, or any other matter of the heart, I have never witnessed her waver or deal with any of it without prayer.

These days we live six hours apart, so we don't see each other very much. But thanks to technology, we talk regularly. And one thing we do most is share prayer requests.

Brooke remains one of the most amazing prayer warriors in my life. She has made it through all the hard stuff by praying her way through it. She has helped *me* through the hard stuff by praying me through it. Whatever she does and whatever happens—Brooke prays.

When Brooke first shared the concept of this book with me, I knew reading it would be like sitting down and talking with her. I knew she would go right to the heart. I knew her words would be filled with wisdom and grace. And I knew that after I read it, the way I prayed would change. This book is a gift to its readers, just like Brooke is a gift to so many people. Her words can be a vital part of your parenting journey. All you have to do is follow Brooke's lead.

Jamie Soranno
Mom and Friend

Dear Mom

In 2019, Erin Mohring and I, after years of serving only mothers of boys at The MOB Society, formed a ministry called Million Praying Moms. It was a response to the thousands of comments and emails and messages we'd received over the years that told a sad truth: Moms weren't praying. They didn't know how. Many of them didn't feel like they could, had the time, or knew where to start. These were Christian moms who believed they should be praying, but they still weren't doing it. The results were messy. The moms we talked to felt guilty about not praying. Some knew it was affecting their lives and their mothering because it indicated a lack in their relationship with and connection to God. But they felt helpless to do anything about it because they were already so overwhelmed by other parts of life.

Prayer, one of the most important parts of Christian parenting, was being overlooked, swept under the rug, or ignored completely, and the toll it took on the hearts of moms was overwhelming.

This book, and the Million Praying Moms ministry itself, is our solution for you. It was sparked by a survey we took of

these same moms asking one simple question: “If you believe you should be praying, but are not, why?” We must’ve hit a nerve, because we received hundreds of replies, some making it clear that moms experience deep guilt and shame over this issue. So we took those answers, and with the utmost care narrowed them down to seven of the most common struggles moms face that keep them from prayer. Each of the first seven chapters in this book represents one of those challenges, and is designed to offer you biblical truth, encouragement, and hope as you learn to pray better.

Do you worry endlessly about the influence the world will have on your children but feel powerless to do anything about it? Do you struggle to answer big questions, never knowing if what you’re saying is right? Do the dirty dishes, mounds of laundry, never-ending homework, and overflowing schedules make you wish you had a game plan for parenting? Something that would never fail you and never let you down?

If so, this book is for you!

Every mom I know, if she’s being honest, feels the same way . . . or at least has at some point. I certainly have. When my two children were very young, the common challenges of motherhood often left me completely overwhelmed and sometimes even hopeless. It didn’t take long to realize that I did not possess the skills needed to be the kind of mom I wanted to be. I’m not talking about skills like changing a diaper or getting a child to sleep through the night (although there can be a learning curve there too). I lacked the spiritual skill set to combat the lies the enemy threw at me on a regular basis.

I didn’t know how to see the world through the lens of God’s Word instead of through the sticky lenses of my failures. I knew letting my emotions control my response to my kids wasn’t

the answer, but I didn't have the tools I needed to get them in line. Running away from the chaos—something I had a habit of doing—wasn't the answer either, but I didn't know how to get the strength I needed to press in.

But there was one thing I did know.

Many years prior to becoming a mom, I chose to follow Jesus, and I believed and had settled in my mind and heart that God's Word—the Bible—was completely and absolutely true. I had decided to stake my life on it, so when the challenges of motherhood kicked my feet out from under me and left me desperate for help, I turned to the one person I knew I could count on: God. It seems simple, and it is. I just turned to the God I knew could help me. Honestly, I'm not sure why I didn't invite Him into my mess sooner.

And so I began doing the only thing I could think of—praying and begging God to do something in my home. I didn't really know how to pray that well. I had prayed throughout my life as a Christian, but mostly the “Lord, help me remember the answers to the questions on this exam,” or “Lord, keep them safe,” kind of prayers. Don't get me wrong, those prayers are great. Learning to pray like that, to pray at all, was a fantastic training ground for the vibrant prayer life God would develop in me years later. But those prayers weren't enough for the mothering season of my life—a season that stripped me of my pride and caused me to ask for help more often than anything else I'd ever done.

I needed something more.

So I began a practice that would change literally everything about my life—praying God's Word back to Him.

The first time I prayed Scripture I was studying Ezekiel 36:26. I can't remember why I was studying that section of Scripture,

but I do remember that when I read those words, it was as if a bomb went off in my heart. I've described it in other books, but it helped me to have a biblically correct understanding of my role as a mother for the first time: God is the One who changes hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. I get to partner with Him in that process, but He's the One who makes it happen. Period.

Before I even realized what was happening, I was praying, "Lord, change their hearts of stone to hearts of flesh" on a regular basis. I wrote that verse on a sticky note and placed it outside the doors to my children's rooms so I could remember to pray it every night before bed. I even began to ask the Lord to change my heart. Even though I'd been a believer for a long time, I was realizing that there were still lots of stony places that needed His softening touch.

The next verse or passage I remember having this effect on me was Numbers 6:24–26, which says, "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace" (ESV). I prayed this special prayer over my boys every night before bed, and even now, as young teenagers, they still ask for the Numbers 6 prayer before they go to sleep. I have prayed this prayer over them for more than thirteen years; it's become a beautiful staple, creating a habit of prayer in our home, and I love it.

Over time, as I searched the Scriptures for more prayers to pray over my children, several noteworthy things began to happen.

Maybe the most important of those is the fact that I became more knowledgeable about the Bible itself. I grew up in church, I knew all the Bible stories from Sunday school, and I even had wonderful times with Jesus in His Word before the

boys were born. But apart from a mandatory reading of the entire New Testament for a class in college, I had never really studied it in depth. Slowly, as I begged God to show me what to pray for my boys, He began to open my eyes so I could not only pray His Word but understand it for myself. I took the time to pause and reflect on things I didn't quite understand, and I became invested in trying to see things God's way. As I surrendered more and more to the truth I found there, that's exactly what happened. Instead of focusing on the chaos and craziness of my circumstances, I began to see the world around me through the lens of the Bible, allowing it, not my emotions, to interpret my life.

I know now that what I experienced was the process of sanctification. That's a big, churchy word that essentially means my life became more and more like Christ's. Not perfect. Never perfect. Just better. As I began to apply the Scriptures to everyday things, I formed a theology for life built on God's Word. My worldview became more biblical and less personal, and in the end, I looked much more like the mom I wanted to be in the beginning.

You can too.

But I know it's a struggle.

Inside this book, you'll learn more about the journey God took me on to becoming a praying mom, find heartfelt stories from moms you may already know on some level (or, if not, moms I know you will fall in love with as they share their hearts and bare their souls as it relates to their own prayer struggles), and be challenged to look at prayer a little differently than before. Each chapter begins and ends with a contribution from one of those moms, and is followed up with two important sections. The first, *Pray It Forward*, summarizes some prayer

tips from the chapter and gives you advice for putting them into practice. Small-group leaders may want to use these bullet points as starting points for deeper discussions.

We've also included brief prayers to help you overcome the challenge covered in that chapter and enrich your overall prayer life. At Million Praying Moms, we encourage you to pray Scripture, so in keeping with that, we also highlight four or five verses that inspire heartfelt prayers. These prayers are very practical, but they're also meant to teach you how to begin praying Scripture if you've never done it before. I urge you not to ignore these prayers or think of them as "fluff." In reality, they might be the most important part of each chapter. If you're reading this book in a small-group setting, I encourage you to pray them together as you close each week.

Part 2 of the book is called Scripture-Inspired Prayers for Today's Christian Mom, and it is packed with practical prayers that cover the range of emotions and challenges moms face. It's my favorite, and I hope you love it.

I also want to point out the appendices. The first is a simple prayer God inspired me to write a few years ago that I like to pray at the start of every day. You may want to memorize it and make it your own personal wake-up prayer. The other appendix is a guide to Christian salvation. Most moms reading this book have probably already given their lives to Christ, but if you haven't and would like to know more, check it out.

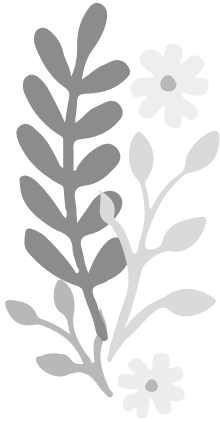
I know not every mom who reads this book will have experienced each of the seven challenges I cover inside. Feel free to use *Praying Mom* as a resource for what you are currently struggling with, but I do encourage you to read each chapter. I've tried very hard to lovingly address deep spiritual and theological issues that I believe hold many women back from living

Dear Mom

the full life God intends for them even if they haven't struggled with a particular roadblock to prayer. Because you've picked up this book, I believe God has something for you inside.

I can't wait to dive in!

Brooke McGlothlin
Million Praying Moms



Part One

7 Challenges for the Praying Mom



I Don't Know If My Prayers Really Matter

Lord, Help Me Understand My Place in Your Plan

One of the hardest things about prayer is feeling like your prayers don't really matter.

I've personally gone through several seasons when I struggled to believe my prayers mattered to God, or even that they were making it beyond the ceiling of my home. Throughout harsh seasons of personal loss, miscarriage, broken relationships, and financial struggles, I have wondered if God wanted to be good to me by answering my specific prayers. But I've also experienced just enough miraculous answers to prayer—like when my friend Stacey's husband, Mike, was literally raised from the dead, or when God protected Million Praying Moms at the very last second from entering into a partnership that would have ruined us in the long run—to know that my prayers really are worth something to God. But the most important way I know my prayers matter—that they are being used by God for something important whether I can see it or not—is because

His Word tells me so. Take a few minutes to listen to my friend Sandra Peoples's story. . . .



Years ago, we were visiting my in-laws for the weekend. My husband and older son were asleep in one bedroom, and in the other room, I was crying out to God, begging for Him to answer my prayer.

All I wanted was for my younger son, James, to sleep. It was 3:00 a.m. and he was happily playing. He had slept in the car earlier that evening, and his body decided that was enough.

Why won't you just give us sleep, God? I'm not asking for anything hard. If we sleep, it isn't going to change anything for anyone else on the planet but us. And it will be a good change! I'll be a better wife, mom, and daughter-in-law tomorrow if you let me sleep now!

Because it was three in the morning and we were visiting my in-laws and life was just hard in general, I got right to the point with God: *You gave me a son with autism, and I do my best each day for him and all of us. All I ask for is sleep. If you can't even do this, what can you do?*

When I look back now, that night stands out as a turning point for me in my prayer life. I was praying prayers that God wasn't answering. He didn't bring sleep that night. He didn't lower James's anxiety when I would pray for him during a meltdown. He didn't give James the ability to speak when I wanted more than anything for him to be able to answer yes-and-no questions. Request after request went unanswered. So I stopped praying. I thought the frustration of not getting my prayers answered would be harder than not praying at all. At least then I wouldn't be disappointed.

I coasted through our days, neither praying nor praising God. James's development was slow, so each day felt just like the day before. Each year felt just like the year before. And I tried to get through it all in my

own power. I was lonely because I wasn't talking to my heavenly Father, and I was exhausted because I was trying to do it all apart from Him.



Like Sandra, I've begged God for something I could only see as good and not received the answer I was looking for. When my uncle Bob was dying, I asked God to spare him. He didn't. Ten months later, when my uncle Tom was dying, I asked God to spare him. He didn't. When we were miscarrying our third child, I asked God for a miracle. I didn't get the one I wanted. I have prayed for many good things throughout the course of my life and not received the answer I hoped for. I'm pretty sure you can relate. How many of us have prayed for our spouse to come to Christ, for a child to come to church, or for a much-needed raise? These kinds of prayers are never wrong, but they are perfect examples of "good" prayers that often go unanswered, and for some of us, this can be the beginning of heart-level problems with God.

Raise your hand if it's happened to you.

Truthfully, when we're asking for something that is inherently good—like someone's salvation, healing, enough food to eat, money enough to pay bills, or, like Sandra, sleep—and we don't get it, it can make us question whether or not God *himself* is actually good. And if the devil can make us question our position as children of God, he can destroy our ability to lead others to Christ.

We pray for something that truly seems good. He doesn't give it. Doubt creeps in ("If you can't do this good thing, what *can* you do?"), and we begin to lose trust in the God who really can do anything but doesn't seem to want to. Hang with me a

second, because this is super important. When we start questioning God's goodness to us, it causes a cyclical breakdown of our affection for and trust in God, and if WE don't trust Him, we can't help others trust Him. THIS is the enemy's master plan, because it prevents the spread of the gospel, and we have to guard against it at all costs. If I don't believe God is worth following, I'm sure not going to tell you to follow Him. See what I mean? Protecting ourselves from getting to this place requires that we understand it for what it actually is—a basic, heart-level error in our understanding about who God is and our place in His creation.

First, we aren't the ultimate judge of what is good, or even how the word *good* is defined. I don't like that. If I'm being honest, I like to feel I'm intelligent enough to be able to define what's good and what's not, but as it turns out, this isn't actually true (one of many things I like to believe about myself that doesn't prove true when measured against God's Word).

As humans, we can only see in part. God sees the full picture of how He is going to work all things together for good. In fact, sometimes we call things good that aren't, or that hinder what God is trying to accomplish long-term. Consider Peter in Matthew 16:21–23. In these familiar verses, Jesus is beginning to talk to His disciples about going to Jerusalem. He specifically tells them He is going to make His way to the place they think He should avoid, and that when they get there, He will suffer, be killed, and then be raised again. Peter—our stubborn, impulsive Peter—doesn't like this plan and tells Jesus he'll never let it happen. In Peter's mind, protecting Jesus is good. In his mind, keeping Jesus safe furthers the kingdom. Suffering (dying, in Peter's mind) would only hinder God's plan *as he understood it* for the Messiah. But look at Jesus' response to Peter:

Jesus turned and told Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you’re not thinking about God’s concerns but human concerns.”

Matthew 16:23

Wow. I read that passage just the other day as I was studying and praying through the book of Matthew, and I did a double take. Allow me to say it again here for the sake of emphasis: In addition to calling Peter SATAN (I mean, if that wasn’t enough!), Jesus said, “You’re a hindrance to me because you’re not thinking about God’s concerns but human concerns.” Ouch. Could our beliefs about what could or should be good in our circumstances hinder the bigger plans of God? Peter truly believed that what he was standing up for, what he was praying for, what he was a part of, was good. But it wasn’t God’s definition of good for the Savior. In fact, keeping Jesus from going to Jerusalem and suffering would have been very, very bad . . . for all of us. In *Gospel-Centered Mom*, I described it this way:

In every circumstance of life, we can look at what God is aiming to accomplish from two possible perspectives—either temporal or eternal. One is to seek out the immediate purpose for our current circumstances. We say to the Lord, *Why are you letting/not letting this happen? Why am I going through this? I need to see the right-now purpose for my pain/discomfort/hardships!* The second and far more important perspective is to consider the much bigger, without-end purpose of God. It involves all we can’t see and a grand, overarching purpose that has existed for all time. God’s full, forever-and-ever-amen purpose has

more to do with His glory than our wants and desires. . . .
There's more than just now.¹

When Sandra was begging God to let James sleep—something that truly isn't a bad thing to pray for—she was only seeing the temporal. God asks His children to keep their eyes on the eternal. I don't say this to insinuate that God doesn't care about the tender requests of mothers with their children, only that desperation makes seeing the eternal extremely difficult. Maybe part of the reason God hasn't answered Sandra's prayers for James the way she has wanted over the years was so someone reading this could be encouraged to press on. She has a story to tell of God's faithfulness that He can use to comfort others, and *that* is part of His plan for her and for James. We just don't—can't—see the end. Friends, it's called faith for a reason.

Second, if we believe God isn't being good to us by answering our “good” prayers, we're going to get cynical and stop believing God answers prayer at all. Or maybe we'll just stop believing He answers *our* prayers. That might be worse. Causing God's children to stop believing Him at His Word is the oldest trick in the book, dating back to the garden of Eden. According to pastor J. D. Greear, “Satan's go-to tactic in our lives is to break the hold the word of God has on us. So, he takes what God has declared and casts doubt on it. Satan puts question marks in your life where God has put periods.”²

God IS good (gracious, kind, and merciful). A number of Old Testament and New Testament verses declare it to be so (Exodus 34:6–7; Exodus 33:19; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Psalm 31:19; Psalm 34:8; Psalm 84:11; Mark 10:18; Romans 2:4, to name a few). In addition to that, He declared His creation good, and He declared you (humanity) *very* good (Genesis 1). But if we have

an incorrect understanding of our role in God's plan, or even that there is a bigger plan than what we can see, we'll question, and that's exactly what the enemy hopes we'll do.

That's why it's so important to understand what God's Word actually says about prayer and the part we play in it—so when those seasons come that make us question, we can quickly do what Jesus did when He was being tempted in the desert: Look at the tempter and confidently say, “It is written . . .”

The *only* way I have found to force myself to see the eternal instead of the temporal, to be able to handle it when God doesn't give me something I think is good, is to know His true character. And to do that, I have to know His true Word. In this chapter, we're going to look at two things God specifically says about prayer that should impact how we feel about it . . . even when ours don't seem to be getting answered.

God Told Us to Pray

The Lord's Prayer might be one of the most familiar prayers of all time. Straight from the mouth of Jesus and found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, this prayer is instructional in nature. The disciples asked Jesus how to pray, and He responded by giving them this model meant to help them (and us) understand the relationship between the Creator and His created. I'm going to write it out in the King James Version. I memorized it that way when I was young and attending vacation Bible school one summer, and it just feels right coming out that way, but you can study it in any version that suits you.

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will

be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Matthew 6:9–13 KJV

Yes, the most basic reason to pray is because we're told to.

Actually, there's less of a directive in the Bible to pray and more an assumption that out of the overflow of thanksgiving to God, we'll be compelled to—want to—pray.

There are countless examples of prayer throughout the Old and New Testaments—prayers of thanksgiving, prayers of desperation, prayers of intercession (asking something of God on behalf of others), and prayers of adoration (telling God how amazing He is)—from Isaac, to Hannah, to David, to Solomon, to Nehemiah, to Job, to Daniel, and many more. We're told to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 ESV), “pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1 ESV), “call upon [God] in the day of trouble” (Psalm 50:15 ESV), and to “pray about everything” (Philippians 4:6–7 NLT). We're given more examples than instruction for how to pray in the Old Testament. God's people modeled for us how to celebrate God's blessings, ask for God's help, stay strong in the face of temptation, and even how to understand ourselves in comparison to the God of the universe using words that offer limitless inspiration for creating, crafting, and developing our own prayers. It paints a beautiful picture of God's saints in healthy communication with Him, but it's the New Testament writings that teach us about the mechanics of prayer—why we should pray and how we should do it—and from these verses, we can only assume that God intended for His people to pray.

“Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer” (Romans 12:12).

“Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

“Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).

“Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2).

“Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument” (1 Timothy 2:8).

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was praying fervently to God for him” (Acts 12:5).

“Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:13–14).

These are just a sampling of the verses in the New Testament that seem to instruct us on some element of prayer, almost assuming that if we’re Christians—followers of Christ—we’re already doing it on some level. There are more, but this is enough to make the point: We’re told by God to pray. More than that, we were made for prayer. Why? Because we were made for God.

Pastor and teacher Timothy Keller says, “Prayer is simply a recognition of the greatness of God. To fail to pray . . . is not to merely break some religious rule—it is a failure to treat God as God.”³ From the beginning, God walked with His creation in the garden, talking with them and communicating His heart for them. And now, even though sin kicked us out of the garden, and our relationship with God has changed, He still walks with us because He is IN us—His Holy Spirit dwelling inside the heart of the believer. God wants relationship with His children, and He’s ordained prayer to be the main way it happens.

On a very simple level, the Christian life is about obedience to God—doing what He says. I know it doesn’t always feel super holy to sit down and pray as a means of checking off your spiritual to-do list for that day, but it’s my experience that committing to a life of prayer, and therefore a life of obedience, every single day, even on days my heart doesn’t feel in it, is right. Most often, when I take a step of obedience in faith that I’m doing the right thing, my heart follows, and I find my prayers don’t end up as mechanical as they started. But what about the importance of our prayers? What role do they play in God’s bigger, eternal plan?

God Says Our Prayers Are Important

I think it’s important to acknowledge there is a mystery that surrounds prayer that even the most advanced theologians (the opposite of me) would admit. None of us understand entirely how it works, why it works, when it works, or when it doesn’t. Much holier, more theologically advanced men and women than I have admitted to feeling stumped at the mystery of prayer

and how it partners with God's eternal plan to accomplish His will. But it does. Somehow, our prayers help usher in the plans of God, both now and in the end times.

Many people I know wonder why we should even bother to pray if God is sovereign and already knows what will happen to us. It's a valid question. If God is in control, why bother to ask Him to do or change anything? I think the answer to this is simpler than we want to make it, and it refers back to the section you just finished reading: because God has given our prayers the power to partner with Him in fulfilling His plans.

When I was just learning to pray, I often found myself thinking about people or situations and, despite my best efforts, was unable to get them out of my mind. It felt a little obsessive (not something I really wanted to share with other people who might think I was creepy or weird), but I did share my experience with a close friend one day, and that friend suggested something that revolutionized my prayer life . . . well, all of my life: Maybe I was thinking about these people because God wanted me to pray for them?

The whole episode reminded me of the story of young Samuel in 1 Samuel 3. Remember with me the precious story of a mom who told God she would do *anything* to conceive a child, even give him back to God to live away from her all of her life. A mom who fulfilled her promise once that child was born, giving him to the service of Eli the priest. One night, as Samuel and Eli tried to sleep, something profound happened.

One day Eli, whose eyesight was failing, was lying in his usual place. Before the lamp of God had gone out, Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was located. Then the LORD called Samuel, and he

answered, “Here I am.” He ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” “I didn’t call,” Eli replied. “Go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down. Once again the LORD called, “Samuel!” Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, “Here I am; you called me.” “I didn’t call, my son,” he replied. “Go back and lie down.” Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, because the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. Once again, for the third time, the LORD called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, “Here I am; you called me.” Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the boy. He told Samuel, “Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’”

1 Samuel 3:2–9

My friend suggested the reason I couldn’t get people or events out of my mind was because God was calling me. Specifically, He was calling me to pray for those people, or the events, I couldn’t stop thinking about. So I started listening, praying. They weren’t always elaborate, beautiful prayers. Sometimes they were short, “Lord, please make a way,” prayers. But there were also times when what I did could only be described as interceding on someone else’s behalf.

I remember using one entire hourlong drive from Roanoke to Lynchburg, Virginia, to my graduate school classes for the day, to pray for dear friends who were in the middle of a divorce. I begged God to work a miracle on their behalf for an hour, and I’m relatively sure people who passed me still talk about the crazy lady they saw screaming at someone in her car who wasn’t there. But God *was* there, and praying this way—paying attention to how God was speaking to me—ignited a passion

in my heart for prayer that has never gone away. I still often pray myself to sleep at night by simply quieting myself and allowing God to bring someone or something to mind, and then covering them in prayer. Once one person is done, I wait for the next to pop into my mind, and cover them . . . and so on, and so on, until I fall asleep. None of those people ever asked me to pray; I just let God show me who needs prayer, and then pray.

I believe this is the practice of partnering with God to accomplish His will in the lives of these people. I don't know how it works. I don't know why it works. And I don't always know what His will is in each situation. I just know that God calls me to pray for certain people at certain times. It isn't my job to know why or how. It isn't my job to control or worry. It's just my job to pray. Somehow, God uses it.

If God already knows what will happen, and has ordained me (you?) to be a part of making it so, isn't that one of the highest honors of life? Knowing that God already has a plan, or even believing He *will* fulfill His promises, doesn't make me stop praying; it makes me pray all the more. I don't have to understand. I just have to pray. As Marshall Segal wrote,

Prayer warriors pay close attention to the promises of God. They patiently persist in prayer by clinging to His words, as if letting go would ruin them. His promises do not become excuses to relax and pray less, but give them confidence and urgency before the throne. They know their next prayer might be the very means God has appointed to keep His promise, demonstrate His power, and display His worth. They do not draw near to God without a promise, and they refuse to stay away long *because* of what He's promised.⁴

Let's hear the rest of Sandra's story.



After so many nights of asking for sleep and not getting it, after praying for help and not getting it, I was guilty of the sin of ungodliness. When I did pray, I stuck to safe prayers that started with, “Your will . . .” “Your plan . . .” and, “Your purpose . . .” I didn’t want to demand what God wasn’t willing to give. I didn’t want to be disappointed.

But in God’s mercy and grace, He drew me back to himself. He led me to a passage that reminds me He cares about what’s truly on my heart and mind:

And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

Mark 10:46–52 *ESV*

Did you notice Bartimaeus’s safe prayers? “Have mercy on me!” he cried out twice. Like my safe prayers, Bartimaeus was asking for something he could already have: God’s mercy. If he didn’t ask for what he really wanted, then he wouldn’t be disappointed if Jesus didn’t deliver. But Jesus called him closer and asked, “What do you want me to do

for you?” This is what I felt Jesus asking me as well. What is it that you really want?

I don't want to stop praying just because my requests aren't answered in the time and way I want them to be. I don't want to stop asking for things only God can do. I don't want to play it safe every time I talk to my heavenly Father. The Jesus who asked Bartimaeus to come closer, the Jesus who asked him what he really wanted, is the Jesus who now sits at the right hand of God interceding on my behalf.

In Bartimaeus's life, it was his blindness that kept him from following Jesus. So Jesus made a way, as we see in verse 52: “And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.” I don't want my disappointment in unanswered prayers to keep me from following Jesus, to keep me from having a relationship with Him that grows stronger each day. Jesus will do for me what He did for Bartimaeus—He will make a way.

It starts with this passage in Mark, with the Holy Spirit guiding me here to stop and praise God for the specific love He has for me. And it will continue each day as I pray for mercy, for grace, and for His will, but also specifically for money to cover James's therapy costs, for opportunities to serve and encourage more special-needs families this year, for sleep, and for help.

How is your prayer life, friend? Have you grown safe (or distant, or quiet, or angry)? Follow Bartimaeus's example with me. Move closer to Jesus and tell Him what you truly want. Be restored in your relationship with Him.

Pray It Forward

- » Remind yourself that feelings aren't facts. We don't like feeling that God isn't answering our prayers, but in truth He is, in His ways and in His timing.

- » Admit your struggle and ask others to pray for you and over you. Borrow from their faith when yours is weak.
- » Work on your belief that God is only good if He gives you what you want. That is a prosperity-gospel distortion of the truth, not the actual truth.

Prayers

Verse: “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me” (John 15:5).

Prayer: Father, I am forever connected to you, even when I don’t feel like my prayers matter. Help me to remember this truth even when I can’t feel it, and to bear much fruit for your kingdom as I join you in accomplishing your plans through my prayers. Make me more sensitive to your calling. In Jesus’ name.

Verse: “And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:3–5).

Prayer: Father, it’s hard to ask you to help me rejoice when things go wrong. But I believe there’s a purpose in all you allow. Prove to me that hope doesn’t disappoint. Pour out your love in my heart today and every day as I seek to follow you.

Verse: “And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Prayer: Father, I can't always see your provision with my own eyes. Help me to believe that the way you choose to answer my prayers is what's good and best for your eternal plan.

Verse: “They came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, Bartimaeus (the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many warned him to keep quiet, but he was crying out all the more, ‘Have mercy on me, Son of David!’ Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him.’ So they called the blind man and said to him, ‘Have courage! Get up; he’s calling for you.’ He threw off his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus. Then Jesus answered him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ ‘*Rabboni*,’ the blind man said to him, ‘I want to see.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go, your faith has saved you.’ Immediately he could see and began to follow Jesus on the road” (Mark 10:46–52).

Prayer: Father, I want to see. I want to believe that you are the God who makes the blind see, the lame walk, and the dead rise to life. I want to be a part of your amazing, eternal work here on earth. Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me and make me see!