

Praying Women

**HOW TO PRAY
WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW
WHAT TO SAY**

SHEILA WALSH



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This book is dedicated with love to
my friend Jennalee Trammel,
a woman who understands the pain
of life and the power of prayer.

Contents

- Introduction 11
1. Pray When You Don't Know What to Say 17
Praying women know it's okay to start where they are.
 2. Pray Because God Is Waiting for You 33
Praying women believe that God is listening right now.
 3. Pray . . . and Don't Give Up 49
Praying women never stop praying until they receive God's answer.
 4. Pray Hardest When It's Hardest to Pray 65
Praying women press through in prayer even when life is tough.
 5. Pray Through Your Pain 81
Praying women pray through their heartache until it becomes their authority.
 6. Pray When God Seems Silent 97
Praying women trust God in the silence and the not knowing.
 7. Pray with the Power of the Word of God 115
Praying women don't depend on their own strength but on the power of God's Word.

Contents

8. Pray with Your Armor On 131
Praying women put on the whole armor of God, trusting in His promises.
9. Pray When You Need a Breakthrough 151
Praying women know that the greatest breakthrough is in their own hearts.
10. Pray from a Place of Victory 169
Praying women know that the battle is already won.
- Conclusion 187
- Acknowledgments 193
- Notes 195

Introduction

I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me.

C. S. Lewis

Prayer started to confuse me when I was about six years old, all because of a story my mom told me about my grandfather.

My Scottish grandfather was a man of few words. For him, there was one and only one way to do most things. And when it came to prayer before meals, he knew the formula, and it was very simple, stated with a strong, solemn, imagine-he's-a-character-in-the-movie-Braveheart accent: "For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us trrrruuuly thankful. Amen."

The end. That was how you did it. That was *the* way to pray.

But one day my dear nana asked my grandfather if he might consider a little expansion to his lifelong standard prayer. It was an important day for the family, and she wanted his prayer to reflect that. As you might imagine, it didn't go well.

Missionaries from Africa were coming to the house for a meal after speaking at church, and Nana had pulled out all the stops for the guests of honor. The wedding china, the family silver, and a Waterford crystal vase filled with

pale pink roses from her garden set the stage. Everything was fresh and new . . . apart from one thing: my grandfather.

“William, everything is perfect for our special guests. Before we eat, do you think you could please pray something a wee bit deeper, something bigger, something . . . longer? I want this visit to be perfect.”

He grunted loudly, and that was it. It was impossible to tell if it was a grunt of affirmation or not. Only time would tell.

After the guests arrived and sat down at the table, the time had come. This was my grandfather’s big moment.

He cleared his throat and bowed his head. There was a pregnant pause. Then this: “For what we are about to receive . . .” The same old line he offered every day, at which point my nana gave him a gentle, okay . . . a big kick under the table. There was an obvious, now uncomfortable, pause. Then the big finale.

“May the Lord make us trrrruuuuly thankful and . . . and . . . and . . . make me a good boy!”

Mum told me she laughed so hard she fell off her seat. Nana, she said, made a noise reminiscent of someone sitting on bagpipes. My grandfather, on the other hand, was not amused. He’d been forced to depart from his usual formula, and it had been all downhill from there.

After hearing that story as a child, I became very worried about this whole prayer thing. What if I was asked to pray in front of people and forgot my lines? There was clearly a right way to do this and a wrong way. What if I got it wrong?

I’ve thought about that story many times as an adult and smiled at the childlike ending my grandfather tagged onto his grace. What he’d done was combine the two prayers he knew, the family grace and the bedtime prayer he prayed every night as a child, which goes something like this:

*Thank you for this day,
watch over me this night,
make me a good boy,
for Jesus’s sake. Amen.*

I understand my grandfather's panic. Prayer can be intimidating, particularly praying out loud in front of strangers. Throw in the request for an ad-lib and who knows what might go wrong.

My bedtime prayer as a child was this:

*Jesus, gentle Shepherd, hear me.
Bless thy little lamb tonight.
Through the darkness be thou near me.
Keep me safe 'til morning light.*

As I lay under a picture depicting Christ holding a lamb, I was never quite sure if I was praying for the baby sheep or for me, but I prayed the prayer faithfully every night.

I'd love to say that in the years that followed I became a great prayer warrior, but that's not true. I often struggled to know how to pray and what to pray. If God had already decided what was going to happen, what difference did my prayers really make?

That's not the only problem though, is it? If we're brutally honest, at times we find prayer boring or repetitive. We get distracted, and our minds wander. We know how important prayer is, but we struggle to pray, and then we feel guilty and wonder what's wrong with us. Sometimes this makes us question our commitment to God. Even deeper, does God hear and answer our prayers?

Before starting to write this book, I conducted a quick poll on my Facebook page, asking my readers about their experiences with prayer. Within two hours, there were over 650 comments, many expressing the same struggles.

I get distracted.

I feel like I'm just saying the same things over and over.

What's the point if God knows what's going to happen anyway?

How do I know what I'm supposed to pray?

I get bored.

How do I know God hears me?
I didn't get an answer last time, so why pray?
I feel as if God hates me!
I'm too depressed to pray.

This comment showed up over and over and over:

I can't stay focused; my mind wanders.

I understand. More importantly, so does God. There have been many dark seasons in my life when I found it difficult to pray. That's why I wrote this book. After years of trying to be perfect, I began to understand that God doesn't seek our perfection. He longs for our presence. I've written many books over the years, but I don't think any have impacted me personally as much as this one.

There is so much I'm excited to share with you. The Holy Spirit wants to teach us how to pray and also show us that it's not as complicated as we've made it. I also believe we have an enemy who will do whatever he can to distract us and stop us from praying. If we have forgotten the power of prayer, he has not, but we are not alone!

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. (Rom. 8:26-27)

That is amazing news!

I am very grateful you picked up this book. Even now I'm pausing to pray for you. I'm asking the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to see truth and your ears to hear His voice. If you've been tempted to give up on prayer, just know that you're not alone. It doesn't mean you don't love Jesus. It may simply mean that, like my grandfather, you think there's a right way to pray and a wrong way. Or perhaps you're tired of saying the same things

over and over again. Maybe you prayed and God didn't answer you, so you think, *Why keep praying?*

Whatever your challenge is, let me remind you that God is not looking for perfect words or perfect people. He just wants our hearts. So together we'll look at how to pray when we don't know what to say, how to pray through our pain, how to pray God's promises over our lives, how to pray when we need a breakthrough, and perhaps most life changing of all, how to pray God's Word back to Him. This one practice alone is changing my life.

May I pray for you?

Father,

I pray right now for the one reading these words. If she is tired, give her rest. If she is broken, bring Your healing. If she is heartsick, bring Your peace. If she feels condemned, bring Your grace. We want to be praying women for Jesus's sake. In His name I ask these things. Amen.

ONE

Pray When You Don't Know What to Say

*Praying women know it's okay
to start where they are.*

In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart.

John Bunyan

When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do.

Matthew 6:7

One day I would love to be the kind of writer who tucks herself away in a little cottage by the ocean for a few months and writes at leisure between cups of Earl Grey tea and walks on the beach at sunset with her well-behaved dogs. For now, I'm grateful when I have a couple quiet days of uninterrupted writing at home. I never learned to type in school, so I type all my books with two fingers. If you ever find yourself beside me in a coffee shop, you'll move. Even if you think you like me, you'll move. When

I get on a roll, my typing sounds like a demented woodpecker. Me writing at home seems to work best for the rest of the planet.

On this particular day, the dogs were sleeping, and Barry was doing the laundry, so I sat down at my desk in the den, opened my laptop, and looked for the folder I'd recently saved. I typed in "Praying Women," and nothing came up! *That's strange*, I thought. I tried "Women Who Pray," and still nothing. I simplified and typed "Prayer," and all I found was a piece I'd written last year for a magazine. Where was my file? How could pages and pages of hard work just disappear? Isn't everything supposed to be tucked up safely in that Cloud thingy in the sky?

I had been doing research for this book for two years in the middle of a busy travel and television schedule, and now the deadline for the finished manuscript was fast approaching. I'd spent months on airplanes and downtime in hotels reading, praying, and writing notes on yellow legal pads. I'd studied passages of Scripture that teach on prayer and knew what I believed each chapter should hold. During an eight-hour layover in an airport a couple of weeks previously, I'd gathered up all the notes I'd written over the months and finally typed everything into one document, which I saved under . . . under what? When I opened my laptop and typed in "Praying Women" and nothing came up, I panicked. How could it just disappear? I sat back in my chair and took a deep breath. I didn't know what to say. The loss felt overwhelming. Then out of my mouth came one word. I cried out one name: "Jesus!"

My simple prayer at that moment was one word: "Jesus!"

I lifted my hands toward heaven and said His name again. "Jesus!"

Some people use that name casually or even as a curse word, but for me, it is the name I call on in the best of times and the worst of times, when life is falling apart and when it's falling into place. I didn't have many fancy words that day. Just one. His name. One name connecting me to the source of peace.

My husband, Barry, had been in the laundry room, and when he heard me cry out, he ran into the den to see if I'd been raptured.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"I'm good," I said, nodding my head and smiling.

When you lose everything you've written on prayer, what do you do? Pray!

I finally found my folder saved under a different name, but the Holy Spirit taught me a lesson that day in those few moments of panic: prayer should be my first response in everything. As Corrie Ten Boom once said, "Is prayer your spare tire or your steering wheel?"¹ In other words, is prayer the thing that guides you through every moment in life or something you turn to only in an emergency?

I don't know what you're facing right now. You might be in a very difficult place and praying feels too hard, but do you know that one of the most powerful prayers you can pray is just one word, the name of Jesus?

Anywhere.

Any time.

Any place.

Any situation.

When you have a relationship with Jesus, prayer isn't something you *do*; it's who you *are*.

I simply want you to know that if you have struggled or do struggle with prayer, I have too. I've made commitments to get up early and pray for an hour and fallen asleep on the floor halfway through. I've prayed to lose weight and gained five pounds. I've prayed in great faith for someone to be healed and wept bitter tears at their funeral. I've prayed "according to Your will" and been reprimanded by others who said I was praying with a lack of faith.

We have made prayer far too complicated. Prayer is simply talking with and listening to the One who is crazy in love with you. If you live to be one hundred, you will never meet anyone who loves you the way Jesus does. If you had the best dad in the world, he can't hold a candle to your Father in heaven, who longs to hear from you. Your longing invites His presence.

Because prayer is so central to faith, we think we're supposed to know what we're doing, and because of that, we're often afraid to ask questions. But we all have them. Growing up in Scotland, I know I did. It just took one person's raw, honest prayer to break us all open.

Raw and Real

In retrospect, I realize that to threaten to punch someone at a prayer meeting is not technically in line with Scripture, but at the time, the temptation was almost too much to bear. It was Sunday evening, and the fourteen members of our youth group had gathered in the lower hall of our small Baptist church for our weekly meeting. We sat in a circle on the wooden floor, and after a few choruses accompanied by a slightly out-of-tune guitar, our youth leader suggested that we turn to prayer. He said he would start and invited anyone who wanted to pray to participate. He reminded us that there was no pressure to pray, but after he prayed, the one to his left prayed, then the next, then the next. Like dominoes, we each fell in turn. Most were short prayers, and one was so long that it was hard not to succumb to a nap, but judging by the gentle snores two people down, someone already had. When my turn came, as far as I remember, I thanked God for loving me, for my friends, and for the fact that we had just experienced three days in a row without rain. (The west coast of Scotland is well moisturized.) After my “amen,” there was a pause. Sitting to my left was “Bobbie.” He hadn’t been coming to our church very long, and everything about Christianity and faith was fairly new to him. I was about to whisper to him that he didn’t have to pray when he dove right in.

“Jesus. Thanks very much for everything. Thanks for your blood that washes whiter than Tide or Persil. Over and out . . . amen.”

There was a pregnant pause, and then one of the boys in our group burst out laughing.

“You can’t talk to God like that!” he said. “He’s not your pal!”

Bobbie turned bright red, at which point I stood up and was about to punch the other guy in the mouth when our youth leader told me to sit down and behave like a Christian.

“I think that was the best prayer of the night,” I said through tears. “Jesus is your friend, Bobbie, and His blood does have remarkable cleaning powers!”

My best friend slid over to where I was sitting in the circle and handed me her handkerchief.

“Why don’t we have a few moments of silent prayer,” someone suggested, and we all settled down. The rest of that evening opened up into a real, honest, no-question-will-be-judged conversation about prayer. Everything poured out.

Is there a right way to pray?

Are there right words that we should use?

Should we kneel?

Do we have to close our eyes?

How do we know what to pray for?

If God doesn’t answer, is it because He’s mad at us?

Can we ask for anything, or does it have to be something holy?

Why does God answer some prayers and not others?

Does God have favorites?

Does God ever talk back?

I Stink at Prayer!

The discussion we had that night stayed with me for a long time. I’d wondered about all those things too. I was sixteen years old and passionate about Jesus, but my passion was more about talking to other people *about* Jesus than actually talking *to* Jesus myself. I thought I really stunk at prayer. Have you ever felt like that? Perhaps you listened to someone else pray and it sounded so “right,” so holy, and you knew you couldn’t come up with anything close to it, so you didn’t pray at all. I understand that. I wanted so much to say the right things, ask for the right things, but I wasn’t sure what those were. Every time I prayed I said the same things over and over, and I was convinced that God was bored with me, was disappointed with my prayers. Perhaps if I told other people about Him, then He’d be pleased with me. My commitment to talk to others, however, bordered at times on my becoming an absolute public nuisance.

I remember being on a bus heading into town one evening when an unsuspecting man sat down beside me. Smoking was allowed on public transportation back then, and he pulled out a packet of cigarettes. Unable to find his lighter, he turned to me and asked if I had a light. *What an opening line*, I thought as a light bulb brighter than the entire Vegas strip went off in my head. Here was proof that God talks back and answers prayer. I'd prayed that very morning for an opportunity to share my faith, and I already had a potential convert. Turning to face him and in my most sincere and, I hoped, compelling voice, I replied, "Yes! I have the Light of the World." He moved.

At that point in my life, I equated prayer with results. If I saw no results, I imagined either God didn't hear my prayer or He thought it was a bit wonky, like my grandfather's "Make me a good boy" prayer. Think back to your first prayers. Do you remember if you prayed as a child? Perhaps you weren't raised in a praying home. Or you may have been raised in a tradition in which prayers were written down and recited and the idea of crying out to God in a raw, real way when you find yourself in a tough place feels strange or wrong. Perhaps you prayed hard for something and God didn't answer, so you wonder, *Why bother?* My earliest memories of prayer from my childhood fall into one of two categories: one, the prayer Mum taught my sister and me to say each night, and two, the strange prayers Mum would pray when we were in a difficult place.

After my father's death, we lived in government housing. Because we had a very limited income, my sister, my brother, and I were given free school meals, but we still had to have the correct school uniform. At the beginning of a particular new term, my brother hit a growth spurt. His pants were too short, and Mum had no extra money that month. So after supper, she asked us all to gather round her chair as she explained that we were going to ask God for school pants for my brother. I was fascinated by the idea. Do angels wear long pants? Does God keep spares in heaven? After she said, "Amen," I sat there for a while wondering if they would come down the chimney, but nothing happened. A few days later, a friend came to our house for tea with my mum, and when she left, she put a parcel on

the sofa. In it were three pairs of long pants in my brother's size. I asked Mum if she'd told her friend of our need, and she reminded me, "No, we told the Lord." She didn't use fancy words or holy language; she just said what we needed. She wasn't surprised by God's answer, but you could have knocked me over with a feather.

This was new information. I could pray and ask God for anything I wanted and He would have it delivered. As you might imagine, things didn't work out quite like that. Davy Jones from the pop group the Monkees didn't show up on my doorstep vowing never-ending love, but I got over it.

Right now, I want you to know one simple truth: God hears your prayers. He loves you and wants a relationship with you, and we build relationships by talking and listening. If you are in a hard place at the moment, remember that when you don't have the words to say, when you're struggling to communicate what's on your heart, there is power in the name of Jesus. (And you don't stink at prayer!)

Just Start Talking

I received a message on my Facebook page from a young woman who said she loved Jesus but couldn't stand being around Christians. She wrote that she felt more judged in her small group at church than anywhere else. Someone had corrected her on a theological inaccuracy in her prayer, and she was devastated. She wanted to walk away, close down, and stop praying.

That made me very sad. The enemy of our souls wants to bring as much division to the body of Christ as possible. If you are young in your faith and you're shut down by another believer, the temptation is to discount everything you've believed to be true. If you've ever experienced that kind of pain, it can be devastating. I remember well.

When I went to seminary at nineteen, it was my first encounter with Christians from every denomination and almost every nation around the world. I was excited to be on a campus with hundreds of believers, as there were very few of us in my little town in Scotland. As well as my classes, I signed up for every prayer group offered on the notice board in the student

common room. We prayed for Africa, for India, for single mothers, for the queen, for fellow students. You name it, we prayed for it.

Most of the guys in my classes were kind and friendly. It was some of the women who struggled with me at first. I was one of the youngest female students. Many were in their thirties and, I learned, didn't approve of the way I dressed. Now, before your mind conjures up images of a flirty dresser, I was the antithesis of that. I've always been very modest. In fact, if someone had invented turtle-neck bathing suits, I would have bought stock. But I did like boots and bright colors, and those apparently fell short of their godly norm. I was walking across campus one afternoon in my bright red boots when I saw a group of female students gathered in what was clearly a prayer circle on the grass. I was excited to join them, but as I got close, I heard my name.

Lord Jesus,

We pray right now for Sheila Walsh that she will see the error of her ways and start dressing like a young Christian woman and not like a Jezebel.

I was horrified realizing that was how they saw me. All I knew about Jezebel was that she threatened to kill the prophet Elijah. I had no idea what she wore! I was a shy teenager. I'd never even had a boyfriend. My father's rage and ultimately his suicide had shattered my trust in men. But I thought I'd be safe in seminary, where people had a common commitment to Jesus, particularly among the women. I was devastated. I ran back to my dorm room and threw myself down on my bed, sobbing from a deeply broken place. I felt ashamed. Every negative thing I'd ever thought about myself came rushing back, louder now, more convincing because these women had talked to God about me behind my back.

I decided to talk to the head of the seminary and tell him I had to leave. I clearly did not belong. Dr. Kirby's secretary set up an appointment for the following day. Gilbert Kirby is home with Jesus now, but he was one of God's greatest gifts to me. I knocked gently on his office door, and he

invited me in. He listened to everything that poured out of me, then spoke about the love and grace of God that invite us to come as we are. He asked me to stay in college, to forgive the “praying women,” and to show up every day and be myself. He was the first person to direct me to a psalm that has been a source of comfort and strength ever since.

I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me.
He freed me from all my fears.
Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy;
no shadow of shame will darken their faces.
In my desperation I prayed, and the LORD listened;
he saved me from all my troubles.
For the angel of the LORD is a guard;
he surrounds and defends all who fear him.
Taste and see that the LORD is good.
Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him! . . .
The LORD hears his people when they call to him for help.
He rescues them from all their troubles.
The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
he rescues those whose spirits are crushed. (Ps. 34:4-8, 17-18)

I went back to my dorm room and underlined these verses in my Bible. I put a star beside this one: “I prayed, and the LORD listened.” The idea was so simple. It sounded too good to be true. I wondered if it was particularly true for David, as he was God’s anointed one, the one who would go on to become king, or if it was a promise for all of us. It’s clear to me now that we can read the Bible, we can study the Bible, but if we don’t know how to apply the power of the living Word of God to ourselves, we remain unchanged. As the words of this psalm washed over me, I could feel the shame begin to melt. I had been in church all my life, but I had never fully understood how personal God’s love is, how He speaks through His Word right now in the middle of whatever we are facing.

I persevered in seminary, taking Dr. Kirby’s kind words to heart. I think I may have taken the part about being myself a tad too literally.

It became clear in my second year that sometimes prayer is nothing more than a carefully crafted piece of prose designed to impress others. The residential students lunched each day in the seminary dining room. It was quite a formal affair, and all the professors sat fully robed at the head table. Each Friday a student would be chosen to say grace. Some may have thought they were being graded on their prayers. Let me give you just a taste. Please forgive me if this sounds a little irreverent, but some days the food was cold before grace was over.

Dear God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,

I come before Thee now with a heart full of praise, yet restless too. Indeed, as Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." The children of Israel wandered yay nigh these forty years in the wilderness, yet from Thy bountiful resources Thou didst feed them as Thou dost feed us. And now, God of Moses, Elijah, and all the minor prophets, today Thou hast spread a feast before us. . . .

It was a lot longer, but you get the picture. Well, one Friday after weeks of graces that could have given Augustine's *Confessions* a run for its money, I was asked, with no warning, to give the blessing. I stood up and said:

*Round my teeth and round my gums,
look out tummy, here it comes!
Thank you, Lord. Amen.*

If silence can be full of horror, the atmosphere in the dining room that day was pregnant with disdain. What broke the silence was Gilbert laughing out loud.

"Short and to the point!" he said as we all enjoyed a hot lunch.

We all have stories. You and I could sit down and talk for hours about our experiences, the good, the bad, and the downright ugly, but my advice is this: don't worry about getting your words right or wrong. Just start. Just start talking. God is listening.

He Is Listening

For two years, I have felt such a strong call to prayer. I wake up in the morning and it's with me, and not as a "You should pray more!" voice of condemnation; it's more like an excitement bubbling up inside me that God is on the move and He's calling His daughters to be part of what He is about to do. That's why I wrote this book, not to make you feel guilty about how much you pray or don't pray but to say that there is a God in heaven, He loves you, and He is listening. Prayer activates the power of God.

I'm praying for you right now and asking God to teach us all the power of prayer in a fresh, new way. Prayer is often the weapon that sits in the closet, stuffed into the back with the old Christmas ornaments. We mean to get to it someday, but someday never comes, and prayer is too important for that. There is nothing that Satan, our enemy, would love more than for us to stop praying or never start. Over the first thirty years of my life, I prayed long prayers and short prayers, but the turning point for me in regard to prayer was when I had no words left.

When I was hospitalized with severe clinical depression in 1992, all my words were gone. The young girl in me who had decided to follow Jesus at eleven years of age was bitterly disappointed in who I had become. I'd promised to be perfect, to never disappoint God, and here I was, on my face on the floor, empty. The only words I silently prayed were these: "Help me."

They didn't sound like a prayer to me. I heard them as words of total defeat. They were the sounds of a drowning woman, but I believe God heard them as honest words of surrender. For the first time in my life, I admitted to God and to myself that I was in trouble, that I couldn't save myself. I had heard and prayed some amazing prayers over the years, but here I was like a child again. Just two words: "Help me." When I had no words left in me, these two words changed my life.

The Most Honest Prayer You Can Pray

One of the most honest, desperate prayers recorded in Scripture was that of a drowning man. Do you remember the story?

Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone.

Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves. About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water. When the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!"

But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!"

Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water."

"Yes, come," Jesus said.

So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted.

Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?" (Matt. 14:22-31)

The disciples were exhausted after a long, miraculous day on the hillside. Five thousand men (so probably a crowd of at least eight or nine thousand people counting women and children) had been fed with one boy's lunch. Not only that, but twelve baskets of food had been left over, one for each disciple. This was a visual message saying, "It's never been about you having enough; it will always be about Me being your more than enough." After the crowd had been fed, Jesus sent them away. He climbed up to the barren top of the mountain to be alone and pray after He had insisted that the disciples get in a boat and make the five-mile journey from Bethsaida to Gennesaret.

Soon the disciples were rowing into the wind, surrounded by high waves. Violent storms like this could descend on the Sea of Galilee without warning. It was 3:00 in the morning when they saw a figure walking toward them on the water. There were superstitious beliefs in those days that demons

inhabited the water, and so the disciples were terrified to see someone walking on the surface of the waves. They thought the figure was a ghost, but Jesus immediately reassured them. “Don’t be afraid. Take courage. I am here.”

For the disciples, each day unveiled something new about Christ. They saw that He could turn water into the best wine. He could heal the sick. He could feed an army from almost nothing. But now this. He could walk on water. So Peter asked, “If it’s really you, tell me to come to you.” In response to those who wanted to see Jesus perform miracles as if He were a sideshow entertainer, Jesus refused, but to the small amount of faith that was growing in Peter, Jesus responded by saying, “Come.” Peter put one leg over the side of the boat and then the other. Can you imagine what his friends thought as they watched him walk on water? We don’t know how far he got or how far Jesus was from the boat, but when Peter took his eyes off Jesus for a moment and began to look around at the size of the waves, he panicked and began to sink. That night he prayed one of the most honest, desperate, powerful prayers any one of us can ever pray: “Save me, Lord!” Immediately, Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him. Matthew goes on to tell us that “when they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped” (v. 32).

Help me, Lord! Save me, Lord!

This kind of prayer acknowledges something that’s always true but we’re not always aware of: we cannot save ourselves. This is a prayer of absolute surrender. When I prayed that prayer through heaving sobs on the floor of my hospital room, the words of the psalm my beloved friend and mentor, Gilbert Kirby, had shared with me washed over me in waves:

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted;
he rescues those whose spirits are crushed. (Ps. 34:18)

If that is you right now, I invite you to call out to Him. You don’t need fancy words or even a lot of faith. Simply start right where you are. If you

feel unclean, I remind you of Bobbie’s words: Jesus’s blood washes whiter than Tide or Persil. It really does.

I realize that some of you have walked with Jesus for a long time. Some of you are prayer warriors and intercessors, and I am so grateful for you. Thank you for your faithfulness. But some of you may have picked up this book because you tried praying in the past and it felt as if your prayers

Loving God is not about religion but relationship. Prayer is not about the right words; it’s about the right heart.

went no higher than the ceiling, so you simply stopped. Or you prayed for something that really mattered, something life changing, and God didn’t answer, certainly not in any way that made sense to you. I ask, would you be willing to open your heart to the possibility of beginning again? I believe with everything in me that God wants to have a real relationship with you. Loving God is not

about religion but relationship. Prayer is not about the right words; it’s about the right heart. God knows you and loves you as you are, right now. You can start with a simple, “Help me, Lord!”

But in my distress I cried out to the LORD;
 yes, I prayed to my God for help.
 He heard me from his sanctuary;
 my cry to him reached his ears. (Ps. 18:6)

Even if you don’t know what to say, just talk to God—He is listening.

*Praying women
know it's okay
to start where
they are.*

PRAYER REMINDERS

1. Prayer is simply talking honestly with God.
2. When you don't know where to start, the simplest yet most powerful prayer is one word: Jesus.
3. Prayer is not about the right words; it's about the right heart.

A PRAYER WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY

Father,

I don't have fancy words, but I have a heart that wants to know You better. Thank You that You are listening to every word. Amen.