



Lutheran[®]

L I F E

FALL 2020

Inside this issue:

*Reinvigorate
your prayer life*

WHY PRAY?

“Can I get a volunteer to pray?”

(Crickets)

No one pipes up.

Have you ever been in this situation? A simple invitation to pray before a shared meal or at the close of a Bible study can sometimes turn otherwise Chatty Cathies into muted mimes, signaling a plea with their lack of eye contact not to ask them directly.

How do you respond when invited to pray for a group?

While some relish the opportunity, it seems that many of us feel uneasy about praying in front of others. Why?

What makes prayer so intimidating? Sure, there's an element of public speaking involved that may flood our stomachs with butterflies, but I wonder if there's something deeper than that. Perhaps it's not knowing *what* to pray or how to say it—the fear of speaking the wrong words or not feeling qualified. Or, dare I say, we're uncomfortable praying out loud because we just don't spend much time praying in the first place—individually or corporately.

But think of it this way: If you had direct access to your governing officials and knew they'd listen and thoughtfully respond to your appeal, would you take the opportunity to present your requests to them? Or if you were granted insider access to spend the whole day with your favorite celebrity and talk about anything, would



you sign up for the occasion? Well, we have 24/7 access to the Creator of the universe. Because of Jesus, our Father is always available to us. Through prayer—out loud or to ourselves—we can share our thoughts, words, emotions, and silence with God. He wants to hear it all: the good, the bad, and everything in between.

If you still don't feel up to praying, perhaps a little motivation may help. The Second Commandment tells us to praise God's holy name and call upon it in every need. Luther goes so far as to say, "It is our duty and obligation to pray, if we would be Christians, just as it is our duty and obligation to obey our parents and the government. For by calling upon God's name and praying, His name is honored and used well."¹ Praying is part of our Christian life. Like all of God's commands for our life, praying is for our benefit.

Luther goes on to say, "God also requires that you weep and ask for such needs and wants, not because He does

not know about them [Matthew 6:8], but so that you may kindle your heart to stronger and greater desires and make wide and open your cloak to receive much [Psalm 10:17]."²

There is nothing so overwhelming that it is beyond God's provision for you, nothing so egregious that it is beyond God's mercy for you, and nothing so mundane that it is beyond God's care for you. He listens. He acts. He responds!

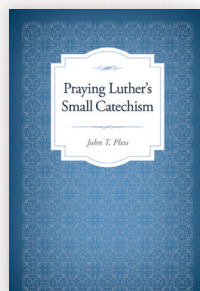
As you read these articles, my hope for you is that you might be encouraged to pray. More than just read about prayer, actually do it! Any time is a good time to pray—whether with others or by yourself. Don't let the opportunity pass you by. When you pray, you glorify the Father and will receive the blessings He has in store for you. †

¹ Large Catechism III 8.

² Large Catechism III 27.

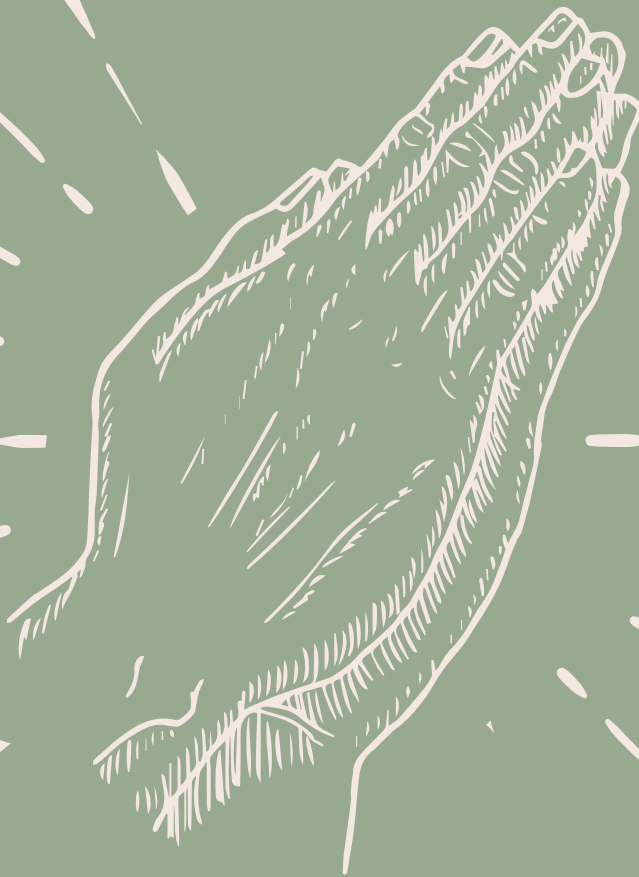


PRAYING LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM



Don't know where to start praying but still have your Catechism? Start there, with Luther's teachings and the Holy Spirit guiding you. See how you can pray through the Small Catechism with John T. Pless. Find this title and more from this magazine at cph.org/llresources.

LORD,
TEACH



US TO
PRAY

So what do we pray, and how should we say it? Certainly, there are many ways to pray and many words to use. But as we consider the topic of prayer, it's appropriate to begin with how Jesus teaches His followers to pray.

The good news is we're not alone in needing some instruction on prayer. Even the disciples had to ask Jesus for help learning to pray. Recorded for us in Luke 11:2–4³ is a beautiful prayer which Jesus teaches to His disciples:

*Father, hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.*

When asked how to pray, Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer.

Have you ever considered Jesus's response to the disciples? We know Jesus didn't always answer the disciples' questions with such explicit direction. He could have asked them a question in return or told them that it was not the right time to discuss the topic. But instead, Jesus invites the disciples—and us—into an intimate prayer addressed to His Father. *Our Father*.

In considering the gift of the Lord's Prayer, Rev. Dr. Daniel Paavola poetically writes:

We're invited to praise God when we deserve to say only confessions of our sins. We're given hope of eternal deliverance when we deserve only wrath. We're asking for bread and forgiveness without any doubt that they will be given. Celebrate the bold maturity that's given to us in the prayer.

With all our doubts and insecurities—or perhaps with great courage and joy—we join the disciples in asking: “Jesus, teach us to pray.” Whether you pray the Lord's Prayer daily or can't remember the last time you truly let each petition sink in, I invite you to pause now and join our Savior in praying to our heavenly Father. †



Q&A with Rev. Dr. Daniel Paavola

Q: Is there a petition of the Lord's Prayer you find yourself spending the most time lingering on or praying through?

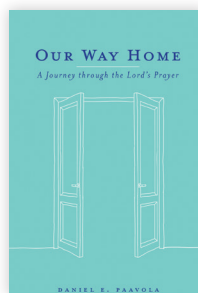
A: Yes, “Hallowed be Thy name” is the part where I pause. Think of the names by which God is called. Heavenly Father, Savior, Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor, Friend of Sinners, Immanuel, Almighty God, and Good Shepherd. The list is almost endless. I certainly can't get through it in any saying of the prayer. But what strikes me is how each day brings certain names to the front. Today, I need the Wonderful Counselor because I'm facing a decision that confuses me. Yesterday, I needed the reminder that He is the Prince of Peace even though our world is anything but peaceful. Tomorrow, I'm not sure what will be most on my mind, but the Friend of Sinners is always good news. All the names are true and memorable. Each one brings a distinct image that is often the piece that is missing from the jigsaw puzzle of my day.

Read more of Daniel Paavola's thoughtful answers on page 13.

³ Also see Matthew 6:9–13.

⁴ Daniel Paavola, *Our Way Home: A Journey through the Lord's Prayer* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 18.

OUR WAY HOME



Study more of Rev. Daniel Paavola's insights to the Lord's Prayer in *Our Way Home*. Follow along with a free digital Bible study, CPHFaithCourses®, to enhance your learning beyond the page. Find this title and others from this magazine at cph.org/lresources.

Is God Listening?



He is initiating.

More often than I care to admit, I approach prayer as something I initiate with the expectation that God will respond to me.

I ask God for discernment, and He directs me. Or I ask for forgiveness, and He absolves me. In this way of thinking, I can forget a foundational truth: God is already speaking to me! Prayer isn't as much about me dialing God's number and hoping He's available to talk but more like me answering a ringing phone because God has words to share.

Since we consider prayer a conversational experience with God, it's worth noting who begins the dialogue anyway. "Prayer does not begin with our decision to approach God with our requests," Rev. Bob Hiller aptly notes. "Rather, God makes the first move. He stands at the door and knocks with His arms full of gifts to give. His invitation evokes prayer from us."⁵

All of Christian life begins with God's action. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit comes to us with the gift of faith. In hearing God's Word, Scripture plants life-giving seeds in our hearts. And in prayer, we respond to the conversation that is already happening.

Rev. Dr. Daniel Paavola encourages us further:

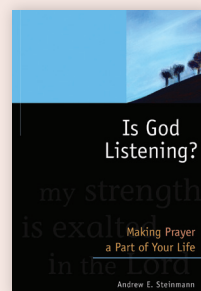
*Join the conversation that's already going on about you. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit know you completely. Romans 8 reminds us that the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words, and the Son intercedes on our behalf (v.26). The conversation within the Trinity is going on long before we pray.*⁶

Why is this worth stating? Because in prayer, we get to see and experience the overflowing love and care God has for us. We pray knowing that God desires to hear our prayers, because He is the one who takes the first step, seeking us out to give us His rich blessings. In doing so, we learn that we already have God's attention. As our Father, He's already familiar with our story and knows our needs. He's eager to hear from His children. So pick up the proverbial phone. Your heavenly Father is calling, and He's ready to speak with you. †

⁵ Robert Hiller, *5 Things You Can Do To Have a Faithful Prayer Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 7.

⁶ Shared in an email interview conducted for this magazine issue.

IS GOD LISTENING?: MAKING PRAYER A PART OF YOUR LIFE



Want to make prayer a part of your daily routine but unsure how? Learning how to pray for the first time or trying to understand prayer better? Through the eyes of a pastoral scholar, learn what it means to pray and what prayer means for a Christian. Find this title and more from this magazine at cph.org/lresources.

PRAYING GOD'S PROMISES BACK TO GOD

What happens when it seems like you have spotty cell phone service and can't quite hear what God is saying?

Even knowing that God is ready to engage with you in prayer doesn't always mean hearing God is easy. Sometimes it seems like God is completely silent. Yet even in the apparent silence, God is working, crafting, and molding us for His purposes.⁷

When it feels like I can't hear God in prayer, I turn to where I know He can be found: in His Word. One of my favorite ways to pray is by declaring God's promises back to the promise keeper Himself. I know these words are true because they have been given to me in the Word of life. In praying God's Word back to God, I'm hearing His truths for my life and aligning myself with His will—reminding myself (as much as I pretend that I'm reminding God) of who God is and what He promises to do in my life.

By the way, I didn't come up with this form of prayer on my own. We see God's people reminding themselves of God's promises and faithful character throughout the biblical narrative, especially in the Psalms. Take Psalm 27, for example. David reminds himself of who His Savior is as he works through some very real fear and anxiety. He declares, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" By declaring who God is, he can begin to work through what that means for his life. Because the Lord is his light and salvation,

David doesn't need to be afraid of any opposing foe.

It seems like David also knew what it was like to not always hear God. Later in the psalm, he also says, "You have said, 'Seek My face.' My heart says to You, 'Your face, LORD, do I seek.' Hide not Your face from me."⁹ David holds God to His promises, almost as if he's reminding God of what He's promised. When we seek the Lord, He will be found.¹⁰ And He is.

The same is true for your life of faith. As we repeat God's promises and let them sink in, God's living word begins to reshape thoughts and change hearts. As we center ourselves around the truths of Scripture, the Holy Spirit invites us to receive life-giving words of hope, peace, and joy.

I invite you to join God's conversation by praying Scripture. Consider choosing just one passage and repeating it, both to yourself and out loud. Let the words of God give voice to your spirit as you receive God's rich blessings for you in prayer. ‡

⁷ See Romans 8:28.

⁸ Psalm 27:1.

⁹ Psalm 27:8–9a.

¹⁰ See Deuteronomy 4:29, Proverbs 8:17, Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 7:7, and Acts 17:27.





VERSES TO PRAYERS

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22-23

Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. James 1:5

There are truckloads of trouble these days. Many folks are at the end of their rope. Nearly every baptized believer in Christ knows someone who doesn't go to church anymore. It seems I can't watch a few minutes of the news without getting dumped on with a load of peril, fret, and heartbreak. What can I do about it?

Our Lord has an answer, a promise for you: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." (Psalm 50:15 ESV)

In one sense, praying comes naturally to us; Every baby cries. How else can a baby let mom know he's hungry, wet, or wants to be held?

Yet on the other hand, it is often difficult to pray. Why? Because Satan wants us to think we're alone, that no one's listening, or that we can handle it all on our own. Well, nothing could be further from the truth.

You're not alone. When Jesus knocked Paul off his high horse, He said to him, "Why are you persecuting Me?" Paul (then Saul) didn't appear to be attacking Jesus; he was going after Christians. But catch what Jesus was telling us: what happens to you, dear Christian, happens to me. Jesus bears it with you. "I am with you always to the end of the age." You're not alone.

Your heavenly Father is listening. Sadly, there are times when my children talk to me but I'm distracted and don't hear a word. But our Father—who loves you, gave His Son to save you, and sent the Holy Spirit to make you His own child—hears your every cry. Your Father delights to hear you, for He cares for you. "Call on Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you". You are heard.

We always need help, but we often live under the illusion that we can handle everything ourselves. The troubles that surround me actually benefit me—they drive me to Jesus, our High Priest who is always interceding for me. Catch these beautiful words: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that

YOU'RE IN TROUBLE

we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:15–16 ESV)

What freedom! We get to come before the Ruler of the cosmos with confidence. Enjoy this boundless privilege.

Know of someone who appears to have turned away from the Lord? Tell your gracious God about this wayward one. I find it helpful to think of the paralytic lowered before Jesus in the crowded house. When I'm receiving Jesus' Body and Blood for my forgiveness, I often "drop" the names of those I'm worried about, like the friends lowered their paralyzed buddy. Those friends didn't say anything. They just lowered their friend to Jesus in a visible prayer.

Concerned about our country, distressed about the news? Cry out to your Lord: "Lord, have mercy!"


And while you're talking to our Lord, consider praying for your congregation, for your pastor and his family, and for all the dear ones in your life. Like you, they all need the Lord's help in trouble.

You're in trouble, but you're also in the boundless care of our Lord. "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." †



Pastor David Fleming is Executive Director for Spiritual Care for **DOXOLOGY: The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel.**

DOXOLOGY is here to strengthen your pastor and your congregation in these gray and latter days. You can find helpful resources and information about our unique program of advanced training in pastoral care at www.doxology.us.

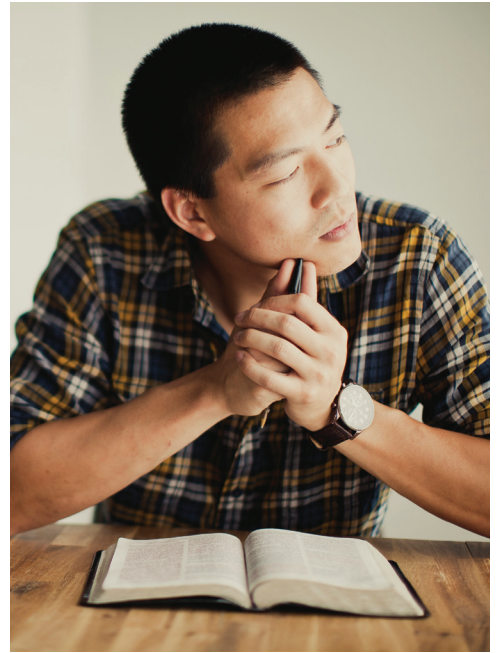


*Call upon me in
the day of trouble;
I will deliver
you, and you shall
glorify me.*

HOW DO I TALK TO GOD?

Perhaps one of the hardest parts of prayer is knowing where to begin. While praying the Lord's Prayer or speaking freely from the heart are two ways we can pray, sometimes, having an outline to help guide our time in prayer can be helpful.

Martin Luther had a barber named Peter who once asked him for advice on how he should pray. Luther responded with a letter entitled, "A Simple Way to Pray" (Matthew Harrison, trans. [St. Louis: Concordia, 2012]). In this letter, he taught Peter to pray each part of the catechism using four points. In our day, Luther's "garland of four strands," as he calls it, has been tweaked just a bit and presented as the A.C.T.S. model. "A.C.T.S." stands for adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Here is a closer look at what each word means:



A.C.T.S.

ADORATION is that time in prayer where we honor God's Word by focusing on what God is teaching us or promising to us at this point in the catechism. Our focus is neither on ourselves nor on what we can get from God. Rather, in adoration of God and His Word, we are being formed by what He has to say.

CONFESSION is that time when, upon hearing what God has to say, we acknowledge our sinfulness to God. If we have been focusing on a commandment, we confess the ways in which we have broken that commandment. If we have been focusing on a promise, we confess our lack of faith in that promise. This is a time of self-examination and repentance.

THANKSGIVING is when the sorrow of repentance is turned into rejoicing. Praying in faith means that we trust God to hear our cries and, because of Jesus'

blood, to apply the promise of forgiveness to us. We thank Him for not holding our sins against us. We further thank Him for giving us this Word so we can know Him better. If we are focusing on a command, we thank God for His wisdom and for the places where we see this command being fulfilled. If focusing on a promise, we thank God for His gifts, graciousness, and kindness toward sinners like us.

SUPPLICATION is when we close our prayers by asking God to help us do what He has commanded and believe what He has promised. Again, if focusing on a command, we pray that God will give us the abilities and resources necessary to obey His will. If we have been focusing on a promise, we pray that God will give us the faith to believe what He has decreed (for us!).

Luther suggested that each of these points be applied especially to the Lord's Prayer and the three articles of the Apostles' Creed. (Beyond this, it is certainly just as valuable to apply them to the Ten Commandments.) Here is an example of how it might look when praying the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be thy name":

ADORATION Father, Your name is truly holy above all other names. Though there are many enemies of Your name who would seek to usurp Your glory, they will all fail. You alone are almighty. At the name of Your almighty Son, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess His lordship, to Your glory. Hear me now as I humbly pray to You in His name.

CONFESSION I confess that though Your name is truly holy, I have not always treated it as such. I have used Your name frivolously. I have cursed and sworn in Your name. I have lied to others and deceived them in Your name. I have appealed to other gods beside You. Worst of all, I have not trusted in Your name above all others. For the sake of Your dear Son's shed blood, forgive me for my sins. Have mercy on me for His name's sake!

THANKSGIVING I thank You, Father, that You have heard my prayer and have given Your Son to die for me. What is more, You have made me Your own by placing Your name on me when I was baptized. I thank You that you continue to reveal Yourself to me by name. I do not deserve such favor, but You are pleased to shower it upon me. For this I thank You, dear Father.

SUPPLICATION For Jesus' sake, I ask now that Your name would be found holy in my life. May Your name be found on my lips in all times of trouble. Help me to give You praise and thanksgiving for all the good gifts You have bestowed upon me. Please give me boldness to proclaim Your name both into the ears of my fellow saints and into the ears of those who do not know You. Especially be with my dear friends who do not yet have faith. Put Your name on my lips so they may know of Your salvation. I ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.

These are not prayers you have to use. Certainly, your prayers do not have to sound this formal. Your prayers should come from your heart. But you can see how praying in this way helps us to talk about God's Word with Him. He has spoken to us, and the A.C.T.S. outline allows us to engage with what He has said.¹¹ †

Your turn! Use this model to craft a prayer to God. You can pray through part of the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, or use this structure to share what's on your mind.

ADORATION

CONFESSION

THANKSGIVING

SUPPLICATION

5 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HAVE A FAITHFUL PRAYER LIFE



Continue reading about how you can lead a more faithful prayer life by making time to pray, preparing to pray, and more in *5 Things You Can Do to Have a Faithful Prayer Life*. Find this title and more from this magazine at cph.org/llresources.

¹¹ Excerpt taken from *5 Things You Can Do To Have a Faithful Prayer Life*, pp. 71–74.



Rev. Dr. Daniel Paavola is a professor of theology at Concordia University Wisconsin, who has mastered the arts of storytelling and illustration as ways to communicate biblical truths in relevant ways. He's applied this teaching style to his book,

Our Way Home: A Journey through

the Lord's Prayer, in which he invites the reader on a lively journey to discover the kingdom, power, and glory of the Father anew throughout the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. In the Q & A below, he shares more reflections about prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and encouragement to pray, even when it's hard.



Journeying through Prayer

Q: What inspired you to write *Our Way Home*?

A: When I was the pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Butternut, Wisconsin, we had new adult member classes at least twice a year. I developed the image of the Lord's Prayer as a journey for the hour that we would spend on prayer. It was something new to lifelong Lutherans and easy to grasp for those who were relatively new to the faith.

Later, I used the diagram and the idea of the prayer, as a journey with my classes at Concordia University Wisconsin and found that students responded well to it. It was memorable enough for them so that they easily could write a one-page essay on it. I thought that the overall idea could be expanded and become a book

with even more images and applications to the lives of the readers. I appreciate, very much, the encouragement from Concordia Publishing House that brought the book to light.

Q: If you could tell someone one thing about prayer, what would it be?

A: While God already knows our needs, He is genuinely glad to have us tell Him what's on our hearts. Isn't it amazing that God actually asks us, "What are you worried about?" When we tell Him, He's not bored or wishing we'd hurry it up. He listens to our cares and hears our requests even while He already knows the kindness that He has planned.

Q: What encouragement would you give someone who hasn't seen God answer their prayer?

A: God's answer is already here, at least in part. At the end of a day, when I've prayed for something to get fixed or changed, I'm tempted to say to God, "I asked and asked, but nothing happened. You didn't do anything." I can imagine God putting an arm around my shoulder and saying, "Well, Dan, we worked on your patience, didn't we?" Yes, that is always being worked on. So maybe the real answer is what's happening in me. Maybe the gifts of prayer include our patience, trusting without having to see the whole plan. The gift of prayer leads me to more thanksgiving than asking. Those changes are happening right now, along with a strengthened relationship with God. He knows when and how to bring us the things that we're seeking, but we don't have to wait to be active with God in prayer.

Q: If God's will is always done anyway, why bother praying at all?

A: We pray to be a part of the conversation with God. In an ordinary relationship, not every conversation changes our situation. In fact, so often someone simply wants to talk. Talking makes it better, even if nothing changes. This is also true of our relationship with our Father. We're better when, in our prayers, we're reminded that He is always with us with His promises. God is at work before and beyond our prayers. So let's pray to give Him thanks for that unseen work. Let's pray to ask for the wisdom to recognize His work that's around us. Let's pray to ask what He wants us to do. Let's be willing children who know that our Father can do all His work without us, but let's be glad that He invites us to be a part of that work by our prayers.

Q: What tool, spiritual discipline, or practice would you encourage someone to apply to their prayer life?

A: I think that the flood of forgiveness is the place to start. Remember that God has already forgiven us, having reconciled the world unto Himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We've received this forgiveness by faith, and so we're at peace with God.

That peace gives us the boldness to come without excuses for ourselves and comparisons with others. We're forgiven people, standing without fear in His presence.

Then, given this firm foundation, we can go beyond ourselves. Praying for the people near us is invigorating since there are so, so many. Pray for the stranger in the car next to you. Pray for the family that lives in the house that surely needs some repairs. Pray for the teachers you had and never fully thanked for what they did. Pray for the mother and her daughter who just rode bikes past you. The world is waiting for us to notice and pray.

The world is waiting for us to notice and pray.

Q: Anything else you'd like to share on the topic of prayer?

A: Look at a list of what God has in mind for us, such as Colossians 3:12–17 or 2 Peter 1:5–7. Those wonderful lists remind us to grow in faith, patience, thanksgiving, peace, and forgiveness. Those lists remind me of my father, who was a wonderful mechanic. Dad would visit us while we were restoring our old Ford Model T and Model A. Every day, Dad would come downstairs in his overalls, get a cup of coffee, and say, "So what are we going to work on today, Danny?" What we worked on didn't really matter. A carburetor, a water pump, or wheel bearings were all good. It was working together that mattered. So, imagine our heavenly Father coming to you today and saying, "So what should we work on today?" Or imagine you asking that question. "So, Father, what needs work today—patience, thanksgiving, forgiveness, or wisdom?" Prayer is asking our heavenly Father to show us our needs and His plans and riches. ‡

About This Issue's Author



Amy Bird is a child of God and wife of Aaron. She holds an MA in systematic theology from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and is continually amazed at how precisely God's Word speaks to life today.



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Lutheran[®] L I F E

LOOK INSIDE TO REFRESH YOURSELF ON THE BASICS OF
PRAYER AND REJUVENATE YOUR CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD.



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